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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

AN INQUIRY INTO THE ICONOLOGY OF RUSSIAN PAINTING OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

by

William Russell Novakshonoff

A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "An Inquiry into the Iconology of Russian Painting of the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century" submitted by William Russell Novakshonoff in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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An abstract of

AN INQUIRY INTO THE ICONOLOGY OF RUSSIAN PAINTING OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The study of Russian culture has, in general, received much attention, and in recent years even more attention has been given to the field of Soviet Studies. One aspect of Russian culture--painting--however, has been fairly neglected by western scholars. Lately, Russian icons, together with the apex of Russian creative art--architecture, have been subjected to considerable research, while painting of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries has been largely neglected.

Western critics have long felt that Russian painting, particularly that of the nineteenth century, was an imitation of western European art, or that it was mere illustrative, didactic art undeserving of comparison with the art of western Europe. In reality, Russian painting possessed its own characteristics, many of which have been retained in Soviet art; moreover, it even managed to surpass western European painting of the 1880's and 1890's in such areas as historical paintings and stage settings. A study of Russian painting is therefore imperative to gain a more intimate knowledge of the culture of Russia's past, and of its effect on contemporary Soviet painting.

PREFACE

In contemplating the modern painting of western Europe, it is difficult to determine the specific time of its birth. The interpretation of the word "modern" is the determining point here: the basis for such painting could be ascribed to cubism, expressionism, or indeed, to several other schools of painting. On the other hand, painting has had a long tradition in the West. For example, Romanesque served as the foundation for Gothic, which, in turn, was followed by Renaissance, Baroque, Rococco, and nineteenth century Classicism. In fact, there has been a continual process of syntheses in western painting, and this must always be kept in mind.

The culture of Russia is old. Its painting dates from as early a period as that of other European countries, and yet there is a striking difference. While western European painting was subjected to refinements and rejections, painting in Russia, until quite recently, received but one great impetus--the transmission of the wealth of mediaeval Byzantine painting.[1] A widely-held view is that this Byzantine tradition, although often refined and even "nationalized," remained essentially unchanged, mainly because of the dictates of the Orthodox Church which was desirous of a moratorium on painting. This is true to a considerable degree, but many fail to realize that the nature of Byzantine painting helped

[1] Cf. Dmitri Obolensky, "Russia's Byzantine Heritage," Oxford Slavonic Papers, Vol. I, 1950, pp. 37-64.

to preserve this style as long as it did; its generalities and universality may be contrasted with western painting in which there is a gradual movement away from universality towards the specific and concrete which serve a purpose, but do not possess the lasting quality of the former.

Russian painting continued in its ethereal, Byzantine style until the time of Peter the Great. The eighteenth century can be designated as the beginning of modern Russian painting, because at this time the foreign masters arrived with already acquired skills. This resulted in little adaptation, or "acclimatization" to Russian culture, since these artists continued painting in the manner to which they had been accustomed. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, Russia had her own native painters who maintained the classical-academic traditions of western painting. Thus, modern Russian painting normally dates only from the 1860's.

This work has three aims. First, to determine and explain the evolution of that particular aspect of Russian painting of the second half of the nineteenth century which effected changes in subject matter and introduced tendencies reflected in form, i.e., technique, manner, and colouring. Second, to demonstrate that Russian painting has a definite Russian character which distinguishes it from western European painting. Third, to indicate which Russian painters expressed these national and characteristic traits in their works, and to examine one representative work of several of these.

This thesis begins by examining the foundations of modern Russian painting, i.e., of the late eighteenth century, the classical-

academic period which continued to the middle of the nineteenth century, and the romantic movement of the 1830's. Special emphasis is then given to the period of realism from the 1860's to the 1890's when the peredvizhniki emerged. The Slavophile and the historical schools of painting are also examined here. Finally, the interrelations of painting, literature, ballet, drama, music, and handicrafts of the movement called Mir Iskusstva are examined.

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PART I

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Western European artists have had a long tradition of enjoying relative artistic freedom in which they could express themselves in their search for truth and the infinite in art. Although often limited by the demands of the Church, guilds, princes, and merchants, artists usually found such restrictions confined to subject matter and form was left to their own discretion. Painting suffered least from the hindrances imposed by the patrons of art. The wealthy, who were often uncultured in art, did not impede the progressive development of painting which generally resulted from the work of adequately educated and skilled painters, and, through such competency, painting increasingly reflected the society as a whole.

In Russia, modern painting, i.e., since the time of Peter the Great, had an entirely different development. Society was unable to make demands on painting, and, conversely, painting did not reflect the society of the nation. Specifically, the Government of Peter the Great together with the Russian aristocracy imprinted on Russian painting their demands for an immediate "westernization" in accordance with Peter's policies in economic, cultural, and social life.

To demand of Russian artists paintings equal in technique and subject matter to those of the West would have been impossible, and, for the purpose of modernizing Russia in one gigantic stride, Peter

invited many foreign artists to work in his new capital on the Baltic Sea. Of the painters who arrived, Tannauer and Caravaque were the most eminent. Peter, however, found it more profitable to send Russians abroad to study, and two young men chosen for this purpose were Andrej Matveev (1701-39), and Ivan Nikitin (1688-1741).

An important event in the development of Russian painting was the establishment of a school of drawing in the St. Petersburg Printing House, because

> painters had greater difficulty in adjusting themselves to Western convention than the architects and the craftsmen responsible for the flowering of the minor arts. Under pressure from Peter artists were expected to bridge in one Herculean stride the gap dividing the wholly religious, stylized art of the icon painter from the naturalistic, immeasurably wider field of Western art.[1]

Peter's widow, Catherine I, elevated the school to a department of art within the Academy of Sciences in 1727, but it was not until the reign of Catherine the Great that this department became an independent Academy of Fine Arts.

During the reign of Empress Elizabeth, more foreign masters were invited to the Russian imperial city; these included Rotari, Torelli, de Wailly, Tocqué, Le Lorain, and Lagrenée. Catherine the Great continued this practice by inviting the painters Christinek, Ritt, Lampi, Roslin, Ericsson, and Mme Vigée-Lebrun.[2]

[1]Tamara Talbot Rice, Concise History of Russian Art (New York, 1963), p. 213.

[2]Catherine the Great is said to have claimed that in collecting paintings in western Europe she was not a gourmet; instead, she simply gobbled them up. The artists whom she invited reflected her desire to have Russia excell in art, since these artists were well-known in their own countries, e.g., Italy, France, Holland, Britain, and Denmark.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Russia had native artists who were considered the equal of their foreign masters, e.g., Antropov (1716-95), Argunov (1727-1803), and Rokotov (1735-1808). The younger generation, which had already been taught by Russian masters, included Dmitri Levitsky (1735-1822), a pupil of Antropov, Anton Losenko (1731-73), a pupil of Argunov, and Vladimir Borovikovsky (1757-1825), who had studied under both Losenko and Lampi. Although they were presumably equal to the western masters in technique, they were unable to distinguish themselves as Russian painters. In describing this age, the critic Benois states that

> it would be useless to look for an original national spirit even in the best representatives of the Russian School of the eighteenth century. We can find some ten gifted and very well educated artists, who on account of their purely pictorial merits may be placed alongside of the best names of the European schools; but these masters lack utterly the original, personal note, the specific 'Russian' sensibility.[3]

In painting, portraiture became the form in which Russian painters felt themselves most confident:

> For many decades to come Russian artists were to feel more at ease in portraiture than in other types of painting. Portraiture had ... begun to fascinate Moscow's icon painters as early as the first part of the seventeenth century. The humanistic attitude to life which was an essential part of the Russian make-up may well have rendered painters better suited to this type of art than to any other; their centuries-old experience in depicting men's sentiments and aspirations also doubtless helped to endow them with a certain amount of psychological insight.[4]

Another view of the significance of the artists of the eighteenth

[3]Alexander Benoist [sic], The Russian School of Painting (New York, 1916), p. 25. The unusual spelling "Benoist" will be used only in the footnotes in reference to this source; in all other places the usual spelling "Benois" will be used.

[4]Rice, p. 213.

century is expressed by Benois:

> The Russian artists of the eighteenth century possessed both knowledge and technical skill, but they lacked imagination and freedom....Just as the caftans and gowns were imported from Paris, so the aesthetics of the Russian nobility was derived directly from the Parisian Academy. What held the interests of our noblemen was not Watteau or Lancret, or the more intelligible Boucher and Fragonard--those marvellous phantasts of the eighteenth century--nor even Chardin or Chodowiecky, those most delicate poets of the hearth--but rather that bombastic official art, which in the Academies passed for Grand-Art.[5]

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Russia could claim two famous painters, Levitsky and Borovikovsky. The former was already in his sixties and unfortunately past his prime, and the latter was in his forties and his artistic decline had set in. They were representative of a period in which Russian painters generally imitated those of European classicism.

Stasov, one of the most eminent and popular of nineteenth century Russian art critics, largely because of his colourful yet succinct style of writing, explains this classical period:

> Other Russian painters of that time--Egorov, Shebuev, Ivanov, were historian-painters, false-classicists, who never painted Russian portraits which had no relation with nature; they were neither acquainted nor concerned with it but understood only Italy which they visited in vain and to which they continued to fly from afar with heart and brush. Their heads, therefore, were filled with old and new history which, by the way, they did not know or understand at all, and with mythology into which they had never even delved but where their clients forced them to delve. Soon they were divided into academicians and professors; they taught in the Academy, received many ranks and filled churches and palaces with a large number of pictures, completely unfit and now long forgotten. Several decades elapsed in these activities. Meanwhile, there was no Russian art, although on paper it was believed to exist.[6]

[5]Benoist, p. 26.

[6]V. V. Stasov, Izbrannoe: zhivopis', skul'ptura, grafika (Moscow, 1950-1951), p. 147.

Following the upsurge in western European romanticism in literature and painting, Russian romanticism also attained a high degree of perfection, but was mainly confined to literature, since Russian art at this time could not be compared to it. That Pleiad of writers of international repute--Pushkin, Zhukovsky, Gogol, and Lermontov--belonged to the nobility, and thus represented a class which had attained a high degree of culture and artistic refinement. Russian painters, on the other hand, were unable to claim such distinction. Benois reasons thusly:

> The [class] origin of our best artists was lowly: Kiprensky and Tropinin were serfs, Varnek's father was a cabinet-maker, Alexander Ivanov was the son of a foundling, etc. This fact laid its seal on their entire life, and its effect could not be removed by either the Academy, or the French language, dancing lessons, and all the drilling and schooling they went through.[7]

One can easily visualize the influence of the home and later the Academy, with its rigidity and formality, upon these men. They were, as a result, unable to absorb the best that was offered by both Russian and Western cultures because

> men moulded by such an existence could not walk hand in hand with the inspired creators of Russian literature, who absorbed both the exquisite culture of the eighteenth century and the passionate striving for spiritual regeneration which seized aching humanity after the French Revolution. Only those among the alumni of the Academy who, owing to their foreign origin, possessed a culture superior to that of their Russian comrades, created something beautiful and daring. Such was the case of Bruni and Bryullov. As for Alexander Ivanov, the greatest of this generation of gifted artists, he succeeded in freeing himself from the influence of his surroundings only after many years spent abroad, when it was already too late, on the very eve of his death.[8]

[7]Benoist, p. 69.

[8]Ibid.

Despite the many shortcomings in their works, these artists reflected the development of Russian civilization. Often unsure of their aims, nevertheless they offered a basis upon which painting could progress in a constructive manner. Such a painter was Levitsky, often called the "Gainsborough of Russian art,"[9] and, consequently, "the father of Russian portraiture." This comparison is only valid in regard to the influence that both exerted upon succeeding generations of portraitists in their respective countries.

Levitsky mastered the technical aspects of painting at an early age. As a result, his works reveal the confident strokes of a skilled artist. His personality was evident in his works, for although academism was the officially recognized manner of painting, Levitsky produced works in a "grand manner," i.e., his paintings exuded a vitality and warmth seldom found in academism. Because his portrait of Prince A. M. Golitsyn was engraved in Vienna and copies of it widely circulated throughout western Europe,[10] he was the first modern Russian painter to become known abroad.

> However numerous the influences of European Court portraiture may be, Levitski had absorbed them, made them his own, and was now prepared to offer his own contribution to European painting. This portrait of Kokorinov, for which Levitski was made an academician, was the clearest proof of the distance Russian society had come in the little more than a lifetime which had elapsed since the foundation of St. Petersburg.[11]

[9]Rice, p. 216.

[10]George Hamilton, The Art and Architecture of Russia (Harmondsworth, Mx, 1954), p. 230.

[11]Ibid., p. 229.

One should keep in mind that Levitsky's portraits, as those of Borovikovsky, painted at the beginning of the nineteenth century, are still representative of the eighteenth century in subject matter--the emphasis is on portraying people of the upper classes. With the advent of romanticism, however, there is a shift to the portrayal of each person as an individual, e.g., the works of Kiprensky.

Romanticism in Russian painting began with O. A. Kiprensky who, despite his humble origins, expressed a sensitivity seemingly illustrative of an inner aristocratic nature. Neither the Academy nor society could dissuade him from showing many of the characteristics of romanticism in his works. One could suggest some proximity of Kiprensky to the romantic writers who, instead of drawing, also preferred colour in the broad sense of the word, i.e., the mechanics of writing. Uncertain of his place in society and of the demands made of him, Kiprensky was not awarded the laurels given the great masters. This might explain his outstanding contribution to portraiture, since here the subject matter is already present and requires little interpretation. Not only are his portraits works of art, but they are also a valuable account of his time, like the works of Pushkin, particularly Evgenij Onegin with its abundant information on early nineteenth century Russian life.

Russians often went abroad to continue their studies, and in many instances their stays in western Europe benefited them. Kiprensky, however, was negatively influenced by his visits to Rome where he spent the last twenty years of his life; here he fell ever more deeply under the influence of classicism which reigned longer in Rome than in other

European centres.[12] His colours became lifeless and his works revealed increasing weaknesses. Similarly, Rome had exerted a negative influence on Gogol. In writing of Kiprensky, Stasov maintains:

> As early as the first quarter of the century, artists who were strangers to academism began to appear in Russia; in general, they wished to depict reality and Russian reality in particular.... In no way did academic education spoil him [Kiprensky]: he remained independent and strong.[13]

The painter Orlovsky (1777-1832), a Russianized Pole, is often associated with Kiprensky. The former has been called "the first representative of genre and caricature"[14] in Russian painting. One of the characteristics of romanticism was the use of exaggeration and the improbable, and to this Orlovsky was well-suited. His use of caricature and the grotesque is likened to that of Gogol in literature, and it is possible that they influenced each other, since they were contemporaries (Orlovsky was older). A striking difference, however, is that Gogol worked in his own environment, while Orlovsky adapted himself to a society which he could never fully comprehend. Stasov claims that

> [Orlovsky] painted and drew many Russian subjects, but was never in a position to execute them correctly or satisfactorily. He was not in the least a Russian and drew or painted everything Russian as a stranger would, or an alien, a superficial newcomer

[12] See Hamilton, p. 236: "During the nineteenth century for the Russian, as for every artist, first Rome and then, after 1860, Paris were the centres of artistic research with Dusseldorf and Munich important for briefer periods."

[13] Stasov, p. 147.

[14] Paul Miliukov, Outlines of Russian Culture, Vol. III, trans. Valentine Ughet and Eleanor Davis (Philadelphia, 1942), p. 53.

> who had never seen Russia ... he drew according to sound and at at random ... and without any sign of actually having personally studied from nature.[15]

Second only to Kiprensky in stature at this time was Tropinin (1786-1857), a portraitist of the early nineteenth century. As he was a serf who was freed late in life, his background prevented him from developing his talents to the full. His works do not possess the aesthetic value of Kiprensky's; yet, his genre portraits and studies show some flashes of Russian romanticism in which Tropinin "foreshadowed the future victory of the realistic genre."[16]

The greatest of Russian romanticists was Karl Bryullov (1799-1852). His stature in European painting was so great that his work paralleled that of Géricault and Delacroix, who are perhaps the most representative of the western European romanticists. Bryullov's canvas "The Last Day of Pompeii" created a considerable stir in Russia,[17] but, like Kiprensky and Tropinin, his best works were his portraits.

Bryullov did not create a school of his own. However, his influence persisted until the beginning of the twentieth century, and his success in painting has never been equalled in Russia. One of his

[15]Stasov, p. 148.

[16]Miliukov, p. 52.

[17]Before the canvas was transferred to Russia, it had already excited Western Europe; Hamilton, p. 238. writes: "When 'The Last Day of Pompeii' (1828-30) ... was finished, the Italian press hailed it as a masterpiece, foreign visitors flocked to the studio, and Briullov himself became at once famous. Sir Walter Scott is said to have sat in front of the painting for an hour and then have remarked that it was not a painting but an epic."

achievements was to turn painting from pure academism towards realism by means of his own interpretation of romanticism, i.e., "open air" painting showing the effects of illumination in nature.

Commonly associated with Bryullov is the mystic painter Bruni, a craftsman who could never equal the former; Stasov writes:

> In evaluating the two protagonists, Bryullov has constantly been favoured: he was considered a "genius," while the second was only "talented"....Bryullov was more liked for the so-called "beauty" of image which, in his case, was purely external, meagre, and monotonous....In Bruni's case ... [no] fine points and lustre existed: there was always little "beauty" in his works.[18]

And further:

> Bryullov became neither a Raphael, nor a Michelangelo, nor in general, any kind of a great artist; he did not, in this world, create any "bright resurrection of painting" (as Gogol imagined himself to be), and only added, together with Bruni, a new and rather more lively and modern activity to the former dreamy, lethargical activity of the Egorovs and the Shebuevs....Notwithstanding his great reputation, Bryullov still did not create any new school or artistic movement among us....Bruni's students were not like those of the merry, joking Bryullov. He was sullen and ungifted in attracting anyone to himself.[19]

One should bear in mind here that Stasov was a champion of ideological realism, i.e., purposeful realism; he had little sympathy for academism.

A. G. Venetsianov (1780-1847), occupying a position outside the main current of painting, was the true "father" of genre in Russia. Influenced by the Dutch School, he took as his subjects those previously ignored by Russian artists, e.g., peasants at work. Thus he introduced a new phase in painting, and actually was "not only ... in

[18] Stasov, pp. 150-151.

[19] Ibid., pp. 152-153.

advance of the Russian realists of the eighteen sixties and seventies, but even of such French pleinairists as Monet and others.[20]

Although a romantic, Venetsianov worked at depicting reality:

> Nothing should be represented except as it appears in nature: to follow nature's dictates and not dilute it with the methods of any painter, not to paint á la Rembrandt or á la Rubens, but simply, so to speak, á la nature.[21]

Venetsianov's great achievement consists in his complete disregard for those ideological themes which later became so prominent in Russian genre painting. His attempts at realism were sincere despite the artificiality of his peasant characters.

> Venetsianov was the Karamzin of Russian painting because like that writer he also knew how to adorn the real life of Russia with proper forms, very much polished and sweetened, in order to make the subject acceptable to contemporary art.[22]

In considering the development of modern Russian painting Venetsianov's position is both prominent and secure. In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the exponents of ideological realism frequently held him in low esteem:

> For a long time we have admitted him as the father of Russian genre painting. But such a testimonial is intolerable and false; it completely contradicts reality. Venetsianov did not have the slightest ability to express anything of "genre"....In 1820 Venetsianov ... left for his estate at Tver, locked himself up, and began to study "nature." But what kind of "nature"? None other than spectacular lighting....In any case, except for landscape and lighting, everything done by Venetsianov is beneath criticism....If one were to show [one of his pictures] to anyone, not having forewarned him, no one would ever suspect that this picture concerned Russia....All of the poses, the entire arrangement of groups are artificial and academic and do not

[20] Miliukov, p. 54.

[21] Quoted by Miliukov, ibid.

[22] Ibid., p. 57.

possess an iota of naturalness; the expressions are all affected.[23]

Venetsianov founded a school of painting in which he encouraged freedom of expression among his students; its significance, however, was not great because

> from the "private school," established by Venetsianov in the form of a useful counterbalance to the Academy, which he so rightly disliked, no "counterbalance" emerged, and the main thing is that no Russian genre painting of any kind appeared. Even the best and the most remarkable of Venetsianov's pupils moved in a completely different direction.[24]

The harsh criticism to which Stasov subjected Venetsianov merits attention since, in large part, it is justifiable; yet, his judgment lacks the totality of view which we now have of art of the entire nineteenth century. If Stasov were to criticize this painter today, he would likely be more temperate.

Another painter whose importance equalled Venetsianov's was Alexander A. Ivanov (1806-58). Ivanov too worked against the principles of academism by attempting to introduce realism, truth, and life into painting. While Bryullov was unable to create any national art, and his painting "The Last Day of Pompeii" did not bring about any artistic revolution, Ivanov concerned himself with religious topics. He hoped to create the long-awaited revolution in painting through his masterpiece "Christ Appearing to the People," but by the time it was completed (after more than twenty years of toil), the painting was already outmoded and exerted no influence whatever on the younger generation. This

[23] Stasov, p. 148.

[24] Ibid., p. 149.

clearly demonstrates the pace at which Russian painting was then progressing.

Ivanov is highly regarded by Russians as possibly the greatest painter of the first half of the nineteenth century, a painter truly Russian in nature and spirit.

> In complete contrast to Bryullov and Bruni was their contemporary Alexander Ivanov.
>
> First, he was Russian, a real Russian. He had his own native land, his own country....All his life he searched for self-perfection and truth, read with a bright mind, meditated with a burning heart, constantly called upon science and knowledge for assistance, while these two did not have even a shadow of this love, this thoughtfulness, this bright mind, this amazing understanding of things. Unfortunately, Ivanov possessed neither great nor even sufficient talent to express his broad ideas, and what he did possess was formed by the Academy and its education.[25]

Ivanov's main contribution to Russian painting of the nineteenth century lies in his belief in limited imagination--he attempted to indicate the way to realism of expression in which life itself was depicted.

In 1821 "The Society for the Encouragement of Artists" was formed in order to make Russians more aware of the activity of their artists, to educate the public in the field of art, and to reawaken the people's dormant sensitivity toward art. The success of the society became apparent when the public grew "art-conscious" upon visiting the Academy's annual exhibitions. The large crowds demonstrated the extent to which the Russian public had become aware of the importance of art.

[25]Stasov, p. 153.

The first half of the nineteenth century was an exciting period in Russian painting because of the brief span from its infancy to its maturity:

> Russia's isolation from Western Europe at the close of the eighteenth century was a brief episode imposed by Paul's insane fear of revolution and his prohibition of foreign travel. In the following decade the Napoleonic Wars precipitated Russian intervention in European affairs to such an extent that henceforward Russian art history remained woven with the pattern of European expression as a whole.[26]

Once it took its place alongside European art, Russian painting was able to progress more rapidly:

> What is most striking is the speed with which, in the course of this century, the understanding and aspirations of the painters changed together with the public's sympathy. Such changes ... cannot be found, it seems to me, in any other period of history.... It is as if the stage curtain is lowered, then immediately raised, and lowered again....What was lauded to the skies one day was knocked off its pedestal and discarded the following day.[27]

In evaluating Russian painting of the first half of the nineteenth century, Hamilton states:

> Although Russia produced no unquestionably great master of romanticism--for even the indubitably earnest and prophetic works of Ivanov cannot be compared with the production of a Delacroix or a Turner--in the less majestic fields of portraiture and conversation pieces a number of inconspicuous artists made their contributions in a style of painting which we can call romantic realism. In their painstaking but poetic interpretations of upper-class and bourgeois life they left a social record which is artistically and historically valid.[28]

Hamilton neglects to mention the emergence of a shadow of national art in the form of increasingly realistic religious, historical, and genre

[26] Hamilton, p. 235.

[27] Stasov, p. 33.

[28] Hamilton, p. 243.

paintings, as contrasted with official academism. He does, however, pose a question which he himself answers:

> What, therefore, can we say is Russian in painting executed by Russians or in Russia during this period?...It is perhaps to be found in what we may call the iconology of Russian painting--that is to say, in the meaning more than in the identification of the images which were used. In this way we may hope to penetrate beneath the arbitrary distinctions of genre, portraiture, and history painting to discover what the Russian painter sought and what all too occasionally he found, in the course of the artistic experience of the nineteenth century.[29]

The painters of this period, then, strived to reach a goal--a realism which existed in their minds, although its path was indiscernible. Realism--that particular trait of the Russian painters--can even be discerned in those paintings possessing elements of baroque, classicism, and even romanticism. Thus, the study of Russian painting of the first half of the nineteenth century can end with the treatment of that elusive expression of realism for which Russian painters searched.

[29]Hamilton, p. 236.

CHAPTER II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF REALISM

The search for realism in the works of Venetsianov and Ivanov demonstrated a desire and necessity for a new direction in Russian painting. But what had these two painters accomplished? The former had introduced genre, it is true, but it was naive and sentimental; however, even the Academy did not hesitate to accept him as one worthy of the rank of a Russian master of painting. Ivanov, on the other hand, was much closer to realism, and, despite the failure of his hope to create a revolution in Russian painting, he was able, by means of his simple realism, to begin a new tendency which gradually matured into an ideological realism, or simply "purpose" or "critical" painting.

In 1848 the painting "The Morning of a Bureaucrat Upon Receiving His First Decoration"[1] by P. A. Fedotov (1815-53) was accepted by the Academy for its annual exhibition. The impression created by this work was profound; it was the first of many painted by Fedotov in which he portrayed the humourous and petty side of bourgeois and bureaucratic life, even though criticism of social evils was by necessity dealt with through superficial wit.

Fedotov's tragedy is that he began painting at a late age and died soon after his works became known. In his few productive years he

[1]This painting is also known as "A Newly Decorated Knight."

became a master of satire, although most critics agree that he did not consider himself a moralist. This new form of painting became an instant success:

> The public acclaimed Fedotov, but the world of art, where, until the end of the reign of Nicholas I, Bruellow continued to rule, met his achievements with contempt and criticism. Fedotov had never had the slightest premonition that his works were to be the forerunners of a great movement which began with the accession to the throne of Alexander II and led to the establishment of an independent Russian school of painting.[2]

Near the end of Fedotov's short life, the intelligentsia of Russia had begun to split into two distinctive groups, the Westerners and the Slavophiles; their outlooks contrasted greatly, but both felt that the time for modification had arrived:

> The necessity was felt of changing the skin, of being renewed, regenerated, of amending one's ways.
> These moods were to find expression in painting. But it is natural that the echo could not come from the Imperial Academy of Art, a bureaucratic, half-courtly world, nor was the methodical Venetzianov with his humble pupils in a position to produce the first samples of doctrinal propaganda painting. Fedotov alone was nearly fit for such a task, but even he, a retired officer, pensioned by the Emperor, a modest, simple man, intelligent, but childishly naive, could hardly come up to the level of the literature. He limited himself to what Gogol did fifteen years earlier, that is, to a keen, but not very caustic satire of the foibles of his compatriots.[3]

In spite of his limitations, Fedotov might be considered an innovator, since he experienced a brief cycle that began when the Academy sent its artists "into the streets." He brought painting back inside, i.e., off the streets, but as a result of his influence, canvases no longer portrayed orderly salons with carefully-placed subjects--instead

[2]Miliukov, p. 58.

[3]Benoist, p. 121.

they displayed the homes of the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia. The style was simple realism. People were portrayed in prosaic activities, while the settings included all the details such as furnishings and household effects.

One common practice of the painter is to select what is most relevant to the composition of the work, its meaning, its colouring; Fedotov largely ignored this practice, however, since he felt it necessary to depict reality, and this could be accomplished only by showing life as it actually was. Fedotov's practice led directly to ideological realism which had immense significance in its time, and, in addition, has left for posterity an encyclopaedic account of then extant customs and habits then prevailing.

Students of Russian literature are acquainted with the episode in which Zhukovsky, upon hearing Pushkin recite his poem Ruslan and Ludmila, presented his portrait to the young poet with the inscription "To the pupil, from his defeated master." Fedotov experienced a similar event:

> In 1848 Fedotov visited the indisposed Bryullov who was already preparing to go abroad. This meeting was significant. The pictures "A Newly Decorated Knight" and "The Discriminating Bride" had already been brought to Bryullov's apartment. Bryullov not only treated the works of his student with great attention, but was deeply agitated by their new content. "I congratulate you," he said to Fedotov. "You have left me behind." These few words contain an admission of Fedotov as an artist of the future. In Fedotov's first genre pictures Bryullov foresaw the subsequent development of Russian painting.[4]

One critic has opined that Fedotov's humour is truly Russian humour mocking all that is unsightly and ridiculous in life without the

[4]Akademiia Khudozhestv SSSR, Istoriia russkogo iskusstva, T. I (Moscow, 1957), p. 448.

malicious, barbed satire of Hogarth.[5] While Fedotov is not sparing in the lash of his scorn, he also observes life's attractive features; like Gogol, he feels obliged to instill brightness into gloom. Pictorially, Fedotov can be seen as a bridge between the old art and the new, that is, between the probings into realism by Venetsianov and Ivanov, and the later works of the representatives of ideological realism.

Shortly after Fedotov's death, a new era in Russian painting began with the accession of Alexander II to the throne (1855). Miliukov explains the general spirit of liberty which arose at this time:

> It manifested itself negatively in the protest against all officially approved standards, and positively in the acceptance by the artists of the idea of serving the people. The principles of realism established during the preceding epoch now gained in strength and growth. But in harmony with the general mood which prevailed during the first decade of the new reign, realism in art was made to serve a utilitarian task--that of exposing the evils of the existing order. By this it disclosed both its newly acquired strength and its temporary weakness, inasmuch as the utilitarian approach was inconsistent with art's proper function--artistic realism.[6]

According to Miliukov, a crisis in Russian painting occurred because of two factors. First, the Academy was no longer a world entirely apart from reality for, since the 1840's, its students were encouraged to attempt genre painting, or rather, were "turned out into the streets from the Academy 'greenhouses.'"[7] This led to a feeling of independence in the artists who no longer sought to satisfy the

[5] M. V. Alpatov, Russian Impact on Art (New York, 1950), p. 211.

[6] Miliukov, p. 59.

[7] Ibid.

demands of their patrons. Second, a rival school was established in Moscow, i.e., the School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture,[8] which, far removed from courtly influences, was permeated with freedom never experienced by those in the Academy in St. Petersburg.

[8]Now the Surikov Institute, named after the famous painter V. I. Surikov.

CHAPTER III

IDEOLOGICAL REALISM

The development of realism in painting, as in literature, did not lack direction. Pictorial and literary artists were constantly urged by critics to have a goal in mind in order to attain something concrete. At the same time artists felt that there had been a surfeit of the uncertainty of earlier generations concerning aims and purposes in creative activity. Such exhortations were made by several noted critics of the middle of the nineteenth century, and the greatest of these was Belinsky, who, in the 1840's, was the foremost literary critic. In literature, he desired only the natural in a life filled with liberal aspirations, from which a national character would emerge. Furthermore, he felt that aesthetics in literature was irrelevant, and that social and political ideas were of prime importance. While his views on art were not broadly expounded, nonetheless they harmonized with his general view on literature.

It was not until the 1850's and particularly the 1860's that Belinsky's successors became prominent and influential. Dobrolyubov and Pisarev, and particularly Chernyshevsky, helped to mold the opinions of the Russian public by stating emphatically that literature was essentially a means for expressing ideas, and that form and style were relatively unimportant. Soon, even many conservative writers attempted to please the aforementioned "civic" critics. With the application of

this idea to painting, painters became no less anxious to satisfy these critics.

Belinsky, as a progressive critic, described the task of art:

> The highest and most sacred interest of society is its own well-being, equally distributed among all its members. The road to this well-being is consciousness, and art, as much as science, can help consciousness. Science and art are equally necessary: science cannot take the place of art, nor art of science.[1]

The most important art critic, however, was Chernyshevsky, whose dissertation "The Aesthetic Relationship of Art to Reality" appeared on May 3, 1855. Chernyshevsky writes:

> Reproduction of life is the general characteristic feature of art and constitutes its essence. Works of art often have another purpose, viz., to explain life; they often also have the purpose of pronouncing judgment on the phenomena of life.[2]

In the same year he criticized his own dissertation (using not his own name, but the initials N. P.), because he felt that it would not receive proper criticism from those critics who were still too much under the influence of idealism.

> The essential purpose of art is to reproduce everything in life that is of interest to man. Very often, especially in poetical works, the explanation of life, judgment of its phenomena, also comes to the forefront. The relation of art to life is the same as that of history; the only difference in content is that history speaks of social life, whereas art speaks of individual life; history speaks of the life of mankind, whereas art speaks of the life of man....When confining himself to the reproduction of the phenomena of life, the artist satisfies our curiosity or stimulates our recollections of life. But if at the same time he explains and pronounces judgment on the phenomena reproduced, he becomes a thinker and, in addition to its artistic merit, his

[1] V. G. Belinsky, Vzgliad na russkuiu literaturu 1846 i 1847 gg. (Moscow, 1960), p. 94.

[2] Nikolai Chernyshevsky, Selected Philosophical Essays (Moscow, 1953), p. 381.

> work acquires a still higher significance, viz., scientific significance.[3]

In essence, Chernyshevsky believed that reality was superior to its imitation in art, while form was inferior to expression and subject matter; for the sake of social progress, the latter was of prime importance. In his concept of reality he claimed that individual objects were superior to their imitation in art, and in this he was accurate. A problem arises, however, since reality consists of a combination of individual objects; indeed, besides a combination, there is frequently a contrast or juxtaposition, a confrontation, or a moulding of individual objects, but here Chernyshevsky does not explain himself. In order to help society choose the path of progress, art would, by necessity, be concerned with various ideas based on reality, and the totality of all phenomena in it in order to be truthful. One cannot doubt that Chernyshevsky felt the necessity of expressing truth, i.e., the importance of man in society, and the need for the betterment of both. The application of this idea, however, with its consequent extension, can present a problem.

If an idea has universal truth, then its expression, regardless of form and style, will always be truthful. A painting which is such an expression will have this infinite quality. But what occurs when an assumed universal and infinite truth really proves limited and finite? In literature, a work may be rewritten, a foreword or epilogue added, but when form and style which could have contributed some lasting interest have been sacrificed in a painting, the viewer is often unable

[3]Chernyshevsky, p. 403.

to comprehend its significance.

Hegel thought of art as representing a high ideal, and thus placed it above reality. Chernyshevsky, however, endeavoured to bring art to reality and vice versa. He thought of the Russians' understanding life in the fuller, broader sense, enjoying its local beauty, and not the beauty of some distant mountains; art, he felt, should serve as the vehicle revealing to man the beauty of the real world.

At this time, art in the West had lost much of its utilitarianism, and was preoccupied with the idea of "art for art's sake." There were exceptions, of course. In France many artists mocked the evils of the Third Empire, and in England Dickens vividly portrayed the adverse consequences of the Industrial Revolution. In Russia, critics such as Chernyshevsky felt that the time had come for artists to depict "ideological" reality in their work, i.e., to become civic-minded.

The concept of citizen was taken up by both artists and writers. This is illustrated in one of Nekrasov's poems:

> And thou, poet, art chosen of the skies,
> Voice of truths eternal.
> Do not believe the hungry mortal
> Unworthy of prophetic song.
> Do not believe that men have fallen,
> God is not dead in man,
> The cry of a believing heart
> Will always reach man's spirit.
> Become a citizen! In serving art,
> Live for the good of fellow-men,
> Subjecting genius to the significance
> Of all-embracing love.[4]

Artists became civic-minded at the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century. Many writers have given reasons for this

[4]N. A. Nekrasov, "Poet i Grazhdanin," Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem, T. II (Moscow, 1948), p. 11.

occurrence--guidance from the critics, an era of liberalism, and a desire to witness the growth of social progress. These reasons are all valid, but they do not satisfy one's desire to know the basic, underlying cause for the outburst of civic-mindedness. After careful examination of the problems of the painters at this time, a common denominator can eventually be found, i.e., there was one particular problem which plagued every painter, not excluding Fedotov or the successful Bryullov. That problem was that painters lacked a proper goal. Academism stifled any earnest search for a personal goal, while those who had abandoned official academism were at a loss to find the elusive goal; understandably, some believed it to be in the realm of religious art, since here Russian painting had reached its zenith. Had not the works done in the Novgorod, Suzdal-Vladimir, Moscow, and Stroganov schools of icon-painting succeeded in raising the stature and maturity of Russian painting to increasingly higher levels? Consequently, it was only natural to think of religious painting as a stepping stone to a religious "renaissance"; thus, Russian painting (already equal in technique to western painting) could become something truly national. A concrete goal, clearly visible to painters, would emerge. The time for a religious renaissance, however, was not ripe, and this lofty idea was largely abandoned.

Romanticism could not influence the most recent search for a goal in painting. The western painters depicted the ethereal, the mystic, the unbelievable and the miraculous, since these were features of the type of painting in which they could unleash their emotions. In Russia, the situation was quite different. Despite the growth of sectarianism

and religious scepticism, centuries of religious art had made a strong impression on the Russians. The aforementioned features of romanticism could be found in many Russian Orthodox icons. In this sense, iconography had satisfied native creativity long before the advent of romanticism in western Europe. If Russian artists would have synthesized this two-dimensional form of painting with contemporary painting, the result would have been a return to a previous problem--religious art as a form of a new national art. On the whole, Russian painters were content to leave this problem unresolved.

Fedotov's work is significant when examined in retrospect, but during his time it was considered a novelty which was not clearly understood even by him. Others, before his time, strove for realism, but it was Fedotov who gave the first great impetus to artistic realism. He had no conception of the idea of civic-mindedness. His canvases were really commentaries on existing practices and on society in general; as such, they were not the "purpose" paintings of a civic-minded artist. Thus, he fulfilled only one of the three requirements of a painter as envisaged by Chernyshevsky: he reproduced the phenomena of life, but neither explained nor pronounced judgment on what he had reproduced.

When painters equated a true artist with a civic-minded artist, they finally felt that they had a goal for which they could strive. This was not a lofty, mystical idea, but one suited to the nature of the Russian painter, and by keeping this goal constantly in mind, the results of Russian painting were astonishing.

> The hour had come when Russia and the West had to change roles. In the 17th and 18th centuries the West had inculcated in Russia

> the ideas of humanism. Now Russia had to remind the West of the principles of that same humanism which was being consigned to oblivion there. A lively sensation of the existence of man, and profound love for him, belief in the effectiveness of his role in life, in his incomparable value, underlay the best works of the Russian art of that time.[5]

According to Alpatov, the satirist Saltykov-Shchedrin claimed that Russian realism differed from modern French realism and, consequently, Western realism in general.[6] Under this heading Russians included the whole man; the French, for the most part, interested themselves in the torso and dwelt with the greatest enjoyment on his physical abilities and his amorous feats.

It is now possible to examine Russian "purpose" paintings which are among the most popular and influential (in ideology, if not in technique) of the entire period since the reign of Peter the Great.

V. G. Perov (1833-82) continued the satirical work of Fedotov, but the former employed his own interpretation of Russian society--an interpretation which was decidedly more blunt than that of his predecessor. He brusquely portrayed, for example, police interrogations and church abuses; among the Russians this caused as much excitement as scandal. Where Fedotov had confined himself to a realistic representation of life, Perov was satisfied not only with depicting life, but felt obliged to explain and pass judgment on life; in his work one sees the emergence of purpose or ideological painting embodying the precepts outlined by Chernyshevsky.

In 1861 Perov was awarded a six-year travelling scholarship and,

[5]Alpatov, p. 227.

[6]Ibid., p. 228.

like the majority of artists who studied abroad, he left for Paris. In two years time he was ready to return home for he felt that Paris could not offer him the knowledge and inspiration he desired. Of his travels he wrote:

> I find my sojourn abroad less profitable than the study and working out of the wealth of subjects, in town and country, which our own land can offer me. I have in mind several subjects from Russian life, at which I could labour with love and sympathy, and with greater success, I hope, than in the representation of a people whom I do not know really well.[7]

Hamilton wisely points out the paradox of Russian artists during this period.[8] They had long been searching for a goal and now felt that they had attained it in the form of "ideological" realism; it did not occur to them, however, that a change in the technical aspects of painting was as important as a change of subject matter. The significance of the western innovators of this period was so immense that to this day contemporary art is influenced by them. Yet, they were not appreciated by the Russian painters who overlooked this significant development in Western art, and by disregarding it, they almost denied the importance of technique. Some painters possibly thought that, in neglecting technique, they were rejecting the idea of "art for art's sake," but one might suggest that these painters, by dwelling solely on an idea or the subject matter, were as guilty as the "pure" artists in defining the limits of art rather than considering its totality.

Benois advances an interesting and valid reason for Perov's unique work, i.e., his study at the Moscow School of Painting and

[7]Rosa Newmarch, The Russian Arts (London, 1916), p. 125.

[8]Hamilton, p. 248.

Sculpture.

> With Perov, the venerable old Capital definitely enters the history of Russian art. This happened not only because Moscow was the heart of Russian life in its most characteristic form, but also because the Capital possessed an art school where absolute freedom, at times degenerating into confusion and looseness, reigned supreme....A new period of Russian painting was inaugurated, the so-called 'original Russian School' was coming into being, and at the same time 'school' in the technical sense was falling into sad oblivion.[9]

During the reign of Alexander II, many Russians realized that liberalism was changing their social and economic lives.[10] Even the rigid Academy had yielded to the influences of this liberalism, and it introduced a new idea for its annual gold medal show:

> In replacing the set 'subject' for competition for the great gold medal by a less restricted 'theme,' the Council believed that it was taking a great step in advance. But the competitors complained that a 'theme,' such as 'anger,' 'homesickness,' 'gladness,' or any other abstract motive, was--in view of the varying temperaments which were called upon to illustrate it--nearly as restrictive as a definite scene from the Scriptures or history.[11]

Dissatisfaction with the Academy had long been mounting, and its conservativism became increasingly unpopular. When the Academy announced its theme, "The Banquet of the Gods in Valhalla," thirteen students, under the leadership of I. N. Kramskoi, rejected it and, on November 9, 1863, withdrew from the Academy. The sensation created by this withdrawal cannot be over-emphasized, for it was the first challenge to the leadership of the Academy by its own students.

[9] Benoist, pp. 123-124.

[10] The Emancipation had already taken place and hopes were high for other liberal reforms and laws.

[11] Newmarch, p. 129.

Once this group of students was out of the Academy (they were often referred to simply as the "Thirteen Contestants"), they had no body to which they could adhere or look for leadership. They felt obliged to unite; the result was a type of co-operative society (Artel' Khudozhnikov). By means of the association, they hoped to exhibit their paintings independently of the Academy. Not unexpectedly, other young, liberal-minded artists soon joined them. As the association was especially strong at the Moscow School of Art, the St. Petersburg Academy gradually lost both influence and prestige.

An association of painters was not new in Russia; "unions" had, in fact, existed for centuries in the form of guilds of icon-painters[12] and in the 1860's there were towns and villages in Russia where such associations produced many of the nation's icons. The "Thirteen Contestants" and their followers were still too recently organized to make a contemporary artel practicable, in spite of the public's sympathy. Consequently, they began to increase the membership of their association, a move in keeping with the belief of the Narodniks, i.e., the necessity of "going to the people." In this instance, however, the "people" were not to be the peasantry, but the intelligentsia and bourgeoisie of the provincial towns and cities.

The "Society of Travelling Art Exhibitions" emerged from the Artel'.[13]

[12] See M. Ilyin, Russian Decorative Folk Art (Moscow, 1959), p. 102. The villages of Palekh, Mstéra, and Kholui, all of which were near the ancient city of Vladimir, were well-known centres of icon-painting. Today, these centres are noted for their lacquer paintings, the style of which strongly resembles that of pre-revolutionary icons.

[13] In Russian, Tovarishchestvo peredvizhnykh khudozhestvennykh vystavok, from which the term peredvizhniki came to be applied to those who belonged to the society.

The date of its inception leads one to conclude that it was more of a movement than an organization. According to Hamilton, it was formed in 1870,[14] Miliukov advances the year 1871 as the date,[15] and Newmarch states that it was founded in 1872.[16]

By touring the country with their exhibitions, the peredvizhniki ("travellers") gave the people their first taste of truly native painting, unified with Russian reality, but divorced from that of the Academy. Beginning with genre painting, i.e., the life around them, the peredvizhniki proceeded to broaden their subject matter and eventually included historical subjects inculcating in Russians a sense of national pride and a perception of their nation's destiny. Folklore became another prominent subject for it was the great unifier of Russian culture and was as much the heritage of the peasant as of the aristocrat. Religious painting was once again attempted, and this time with considerable success (as contrasted with the preceding attempts). The reason for this revival was the use of psychology--the passion of baroque yielded to a psychological analysis of realism. The critic Stasov had hoped for a monumental re-awakening of religious painting,[17] but that of the peredvizhniki was sporadic, not because the painters were unable to express themselves, but because society was not prepared to accept it.

[14]Hamilton, p. 245

[15]Miliukov, p. 60.

[16]Newmarch, p. 129.

[17]Stasov, p. 156.

The peredvizhniki placed ideological content above technique. They were primarily interested in narrative painting, and therein lies their greatest weakness. Many of their canvases which once scandalized Russian society are now interesting only as illustrative works--they have lost their force of content, while technique per se cannot adequately maintain them among masterpieces of painting. If one thinks in terms of nineteenth century art, their significance was immense, for they had founded a truly Russian school of painting. Their national art was in sharp contrast with that of the West because it reflected a sympathetic, typically Russian outlook on the world, on man, his feelings and hopes.

> It was precisely in the art of the Russian Peredvizhniki that the time honored Russian love of truth, ability to subordinate all to a central idea, simplicity, and integrity of sensation, found their fullest expression. These qualities are disarming even in those works of the rank and file which are weak in execution and poor in color.[18]

Whether the works of the peredvizhniki were revolutionary in content, or sugary and sentimental, according to Alpatov they invariably had a Russian hue:

> The young artists did not solve all their creative problems by leaving the Academy, but in turning their faces towards Russian life, and responding to the social struggle, they were able to create an art stamped with the seal of national originality.[19]

In general, advanced art was done by the peredvizhniki, and their influence in Russian painting continued for more than two decades until the advent of the World of Art (Mir Iskusstva). The response from the

[18] Alpatov, p. 250.

[19] Ibid., p. 247.

Russian public was encouraging. Like the museums in St. Petersburg and Moscow, those in provincial cities and towns acquired the most representative works of the peredvizhniki. Individual collectors, for example P. M. Tretyakov, assisted the painters both materially and morally, with the result that many of the private collections eventually became the property of the Russian public. Of this remarkable period in Russian painting of the nineteenth century, Miliukov writes:

> Like the literature of the period, the new art was accused of being biased, of having a tendency to expose the social evils, and of having developed realism to the point of exaggeration and caricature. The facts that provoked these accusations cannot be denied nor need we exonerate them, for in this instance art merely expressed the actual mood of contemporary society. Indeed the principle of realism was far broader and more deeply rooted in the evolution of Russian art than was at first apparent. Withdrawn as it was from tradition and schooling during the initial stage of its development, the new Russian art was bound to be spontaneous and antagonistic to everything that was artificial. When the eagerness for exposing social evils subsided, art ceased to be sententious but retained its instructive and realistic character.[20]

[20]Miliukov, p. 61.

CHAPTER IV

RELIGIOUS AND HISTORICAL PAINTINGS

The Society of Travelling Art Exhibitions, discussed in the previous chapter, was largely founded and guided by I. N. Kramskoi (1837-87). Hamilton claims[1] that Kramskoi's art resulted from the tension between a deeply personal mysticism and a most acute photographic vision.[2] His wealth of portraits indicates a search for the explanation of man's inner rather than external qualities. In them realism of a high order is also evident, yet they are frequently characterized by a complete absence of background; this can be explained by the stresses created by the aforementioned mysticism, and by photographic vision applied to the subject matter.

Although Kramskoi has left us mainly portraits,[3] his religious painting "The Temptation of Christ" is one of his most important works:

> It finds its parallel in the political and social disillusion of the 1870s and 80s. Ivanov had been confused by biblical criticism, and his Messiah had dwindled into insignificance in the background of his painting. The faith of Kramskoi's generation had been so shattered by scientific discovery that

[1] Hamilton, p. 246.

[2] Hamilton points out that Kramskoi, before entering the Academy, was engaged in retouching photographs in Kharkov and St. Petersburg.

[3] Kramskoi did some work in Moscow on the Cathedral of Christ the Redeemer which was dismantled in the 1930's.

> his man-Christ was powerless to act. Henceforward only two paths were open: to work out some compromise with official religion or to withdraw into oneself.[4]

Kramskoi wrote to his friend Vasiliev about this painting:

> It is now five years since He stood so persistently before my eyes. I was forced to paint Him in order to dispel this vision. I have never had the least doubt that there was nothing of this earth about Him--and this you must understand in the right way--nothing earthly except the form. But does not the form bear witness of the august thought? While I was at work upon Him, I thought, prayed, and suffered much. One night I went for a walk and wandered so long and so far afield that I grew frightened, and, behold, I saw a figure like a statue....How often have I wept over that figure! And after this, what next? Was it possible to paint Him? You yourself ask--and ask very justly: Can I paint the Christ? No, my dear friend, I cannot, it is not possible to paint Him. And yet, all the same I <u>have</u> painted Him....In a word, I have finished the picture. Perhaps it is a profanation, but I could not have done otherwise. I may say that I painted it with my blood and tears. But apparently they were not quite efficacious, for sometimes it seems that it is like the Figure I saw that night, and then again suddenly it has no resemblance to it.[5]

This, perhaps, is one of the clearest expressions of the problem facing the painter of religious subjects; it also helps to show why religious art was unable to rise to a high level in the nineteenth century.

Another religious painter of this period was N. N. Ge (1831-94) whose works are often crude, poorly composed, with inadequate colouring, but whose sincerity cannot be doubted.

> In Ge's work we can see the reasons for the failure of Ivanov and Kramskoi. Ge rejected Ivanov's idealism, and at the same time, in choosing subjects which possessed an immediate communicative and dramatic content, avoided the weakness of

[4]Hamilton, p. 247.

[5]Newmarch, pp. 213-214.

> Kramskoi's "Christ," whose image was too deliberate to convey the conceptions with which he burdened it.[6]

Ge was hailed as the father of a new school of painting, and it is possible that he could have begun the movement of which Stasov dreamed; the potential was there, and the result of his work could have been lasting. A highly intelligent man, Ge experienced a moral rebirth which could have made him a great master of the nineteenth century. In a letter, he wrote of the effect of this rebirth:

> When I read the chapters describing the institution of the Holy Sacrament, the whole scene passed before my eyes like a drama. Peter and Judas became living personalities--chiefly by means of the Gospel; I visualized the scene when Judas left the Last Supper, and brought about a complete rupture between himself and Christ. Judas was a real disciple of Christ, he was the only Jew among them, all the others were Galileans. But he could not understand the Christ, because materialists seldom understand idealists.[7]

Ge's intellectual expressions were similar to those of leading philosophers and writers of his day; in this respect he has often been compared to Dostoevsky in literature. He fell under the influence of Tolstoy, who once asked to be left alone with the painting "The Crucifixion." When Ge returned, Tolstoy, "with tears running down his cheeks, embraced him and said: 'Dear friend, I feel that the scene was just like this. It is the finest thing you have done.'"[8]

One might wonder why such a painter was not only not esteemed by the public but, indeed, was almost forgotten. Undoubtedly, this happened because there is nothing Russian, nothing native in his work.

[6]Hamilton, p. 248.

[7]Newmarch, p. 207.

[8]Ibid., p. 212.

Early iconography had become "nationalized" in Russia, something which Ge was unable to accomplish. The public might be reproached for not having valued him; yet, this is further proof of the significance of the national spirit in Russian painting.

Historical painting in Russia became especially popular during the period from the 1860's to the late 1880's because of the conservative nature of the reign of Alexander III and the renewed interest in Russia's past. Many of the peredvizhniki, however, continued their representation of society; they criticized it as before, but now less forcefully, or they tried to associate social criticism with historical subjects:

> Ancient and contemporary history re-enters the programme of the Wanderers on the condition that this is the history of Russia, the only one that interests the masses of people. The subjects that are given preference are no longer those which impassion Pan-Slavic nationalists, that is, the apologists for the autocracy, the Orthodox Church, the wars of conquest, but, on the contrary, are those which exalt non-conformity, the spirit of resistance or revolt against oppression.[9]

One of the outstanding historical painters was V. I. Surikov (1848-1916) who accomplished more than what his contemporaries had even dreamed of. Surikov combined intelligence and talent to produce works which even in his own time established his lasting fame in the history of Russian painting. The synthesis of originality of thought and mastery of technique enabled him to produce paintings full of sympathy for Russia's past. His paintings were not illustrative--they were actual re-creations of Russia's history: in this field Surikov excelled all others.

Surikov's success can be explained by the Russian content of his

[9]Louis Réau, L'Art russe (Paris, 1945), p. 102.

paintings. Although he exhibited his works along with those of the peredvizhniki (he was not a member of that society), his paintings stood at a level never attained by the latter, for in them he revealed, besides an originality of conception and a mastery of accomplishment, a universality which the peredvizhniki lacked. The art critic Loukomski opines that Surikov together with Serov, and after Bryullov and Ivanov, raised Russian painting to a level comparable to that of western Europe.[10]

Another historical painter was V. V. Vereshchagin (1842-1904), who, in many respects, was inferior to Surikov; yet he was one of the most popular painters within and without his country. He was of the nobility and thus, because of his education and social life, had a broader outlook on life than many of his contemporaries; in addition, his travels in the West had the effect of making Vereshchagin a Westerner in thought and in practice. Obviously, his paintings have nothing Russian about them, and his technique is inferior to that of Surikov. Restricting himself to an almost photographic reproduction, he was incapable of portraying man psychologically. It would not be incorrect to regard him as an illustrator of a type, since he was little concerned with interpretation. Wherever he promulgated a message against war in a painting (he was a pacificist and under the influence of Tolstoy), its form was frequently so poor that it negated the worth of the message.

The subjects of Vereshchagin's paintings included scenes of military engagements in the Middle East, Far East, and later, the Napoleonic War in Russia. Despite his weakness,

> Vereshchagin will hold an honourable place in the history of

[10]G. Loukomski, History of Modern Russian Painting (London, 1945), p. 32.

> Russian art. To begin with, his pictures have not lost their interest, which signifies that they conceal a great power, a great artistic potentiality. It is true that they are poorly painted and childishly drawn, but they are cleverly planned and their composition shows Vereshchagin as a highly gifted stage manager....In his time he was a pioneer, and many of his light and colour discoveries have retained their value until our own day.[11]

I. E. Repin (1844-1930) can easily be considered the greatest of nineteenth century Russian realists: his work was a continuation of Perov's, and provided a valuable insight into the true depths of artistic reality. Repin was of humble origin which accounted for his lack of cultural development; this contrasted, for example, with Vereshchagin's culture. While using many of the ideas common to the peredvizhniki, he constantly searched for new subjects. Loukomski feels that Repin's search for subject matter and his dependency on the civic use of art lowered his significance, for thereby he limited his artistic contributions.[12] Another critic, Benois, claims that Repin

> went beyond the naive conception of art, but he has never yet attained the conscious, cultural attitude toward it. The meaning of painting, in particular, has remained for him a sealed book. All his life he has been applying his splendid, but not completely developed pictorial gift to the solution of non-artistic problems, and, of course, neither Stasov's sermons, sympathetic in their sincerity as they are, nor the influence of Kramskoy, absorbed in political interests, could save him from his errings.[13]

Having been awarded a travelling scholarship, Repin could not benefit by it. In Rome he seemed capable only of criticizing the classics, while in Paris the work of his French contemporaries confused

[11] Benoist, pp. 130-131.

[12] Loukomski, p. 25.

[13] Benoist, pp. 132-133.

him; thus, his travels did not broaden his artistic horizon.

Benois seems to have the clearest understanding of Repin. For this reason, it is desirable to quote him at length:

> Repin's misfortune lies in that, having become a devotee of the formula of narrative painting, he also conceived the idea that he possessed a powerful dramatic talent. Of course, Repin was a great artist, and as such, a very impressionable man, with a gift for grasping things in an easy and interesting manner. Yet, his calling was not narrative painting, but painting pure and simple. By means of clever calculations, Repin succeeded in arranging his pictures so as to elicit sensational effects of great clarity (as in the "Church Procession"), or a truly tragical note (in "Ivan the Terrible"), or a broad humour (in "The Zaporogian [sic] Cossacks"). All these paintings betray great cleverness and dexterity, but there is no truly deep mood in them, no living revelations of the type we find in Ivanov and in Surikov.
>
> Repin's best work, are [sic], surely his portraits. But a certain coarseness mars even these. Repin is a purely external talent, yet in his portraits he tried his utmost to go into the depths of psychological analysis. Consequently, his portraits are insipid as far as colour tones and composition are concerned; they are drawn and modelled neglectfully, carelessly and painted without beauty; and, as characterisation, they are full of gross and disagreeable emphasis. In this respect, they are far below the intelligent portraits of Gay [Ge], and even the precise portraits of Kramskoy.[14]

Even though psychological analysis tended to evade Repin's grasp, he was, on occasion, able to depict something extremely profound. "In European painting there are not many heads which have been so magnificently done as that of The Terrible and son," wrote Grabar about Repin's great psychological study.[15]

Loukomski summarizes Repin's significance:

> If there had been no Ryepin, the whole work of the 'peredvizhniki' would have passed without leaving a trace. The 'peredvizhniki' defeated the Academy, but only Ryepin, with the

[14]Benoist, pp. 134-135.

[15]I. Grabar, Istoriia russkogo iskusstva, T. I (Moscow, 1910), p. 85.

> strength of his talent, provided the further path to truth in painting. His path smoothed the way to the impressionistic understanding of the world.
>
> Ryepin was a master of world importance and the time will come when a passion for the dramatic and a complex psychology will again awaken and then his pictures will be appreciated and valued as they had been once before, and all will be amazed by the penetrating power of "Ivan the Terrible."[16]

As for the peredvizhniki, their noble attempt to raise the standards of art to a useful form, to make it purposeful, to serve the public, and thus to create a thoroughly Russian school, were only partially successful. They brought art to the public, but having done this, they failed to keep pace with the public whose social needs and outlooks kept changing; thus, these artists were in the dangerous position of becoming as conservative as the academists whom they had earlier spurned. Réau points this out clearly:

> The peredvizhniki became stranded in their attempt to create a "Russian style." Misled by their conception of a utilitarian art, which was harnessed to the tow-line of literature, they sacrificed form to subject, technique to propaganda. They are honoured more in the history of political and social reforms than in the history of art. Most of all they liked patriotic, pacificistic, and anticlerical painting.[17]

Hamilton presents a more general view of the work of the nineteenth century painters, including that of the peredvizhniki:

> Through the nineteenth century Russia produced many able and several distinguished painters, but it is difficult to say that there was a "Russian School" of painting comparable to those in music and literature....Russia lacked what we might call a private public which, though small in numbers, through its encouragement made possible the experimental art of the West....The difficulty of the Russian painter's situation can be seen in "The Prose of Life" ... by Vasili Nikolaevich Baksheev....The content resembles

[16] Loukomski, p. 26.

[17] Réau, p. 106.

the situations in the contemporary dramas of Chekov, who also expressed the dissatisfaction of the Russian intelligentsia with a way of life which no longer had any relation to political or economic reality....[The Russian painters] could afford neither to renounce the advantages of subject-matter as the Impressionists had done, nor to wait for public approval to catch up with them. Their successful works were brilliant but isolated attempts to integrate the pictorial experience of modern times with the crumbling structure of their world.[18]

[18] Hamilton, p. 253.

CHAPTER V

THE SLAVIC REVIVAL

The Slavic Revival period was a transitory one for Russian painting. Although the works of the Slavic Revival artists were ephemeral, they had a significant effect on Russian culture as they introduced a new artistic outlook.

Paintings from the late 1870's to the early 1890's have been categorized by many critics as belonging to historical, folkloric, or religious schools, when, in reality, elements from these schools were often combined to produce works Russian in spirit. One cannot deny that the school of ideological realism was thoroughly Russian, but, while it reflected contemporary society, the Slavic Revival movement was also concerned with the past.[1]

Vasnetsov, Nesterov and Vrubel were all outstanding figures of this movement. Loukomski expresses Vasnetsov's devotion to the Slavic Revival period:

> Having quite correctly decided that Russian art will only then be able to make its contribution to the art of the world when it will devote its whole strength to the embodiment of national subjects and when it will become able to reflect the eternal and everlasting in that which is truly national, Vasnetsov devoted his life to the service of this truth.[2]

[1] Both were Russian; the former was basically Russian in ideology, the latter, Russian in content.

[2] Loukomski, p. 30.

During the last third of the nineteenth century Pan-Slavism grew in strength, and while it clashed with the artistic ideas of the Westerners, it also bore some similarity to them:

> However antagonistic these systems might at first appear, the forms of their artistic expression had much in common.
>
> The origins of the art of both programmes can be related to the aspirations of the Peredvizhniki. Although their intention through the 1870s and 80s had been the creation of a truly national art, and for that reason they had scorned too close associations with artistic movements abroad, their work had closer analogies with the technique and subject-matter of contemporary European genre and historical painting than with any specifically Russian traditions. But while the Peredvizhniki tried, as did Tolstoi and Dostoevski, to find the soul of Russia in the conditions of contemporary life, there arose simultaneously a tendency to exploit 'Old Russian' sources which eventually affected even the historical paintings of the Peredvizhniki and the arts of architecture, sculpture, interior decoration, book illustration, and stage design as well.[3]

The study of Russia's past had begun long before this period, but it was only in the 1860's that it was undertaken on a scientific basis.

> These studies ... followed a pattern which had a parallel in Western European research. The gradual recovery of the past proceeded in reverse chronological order. The mediaeval revivals of the early nineteenth century in France and England started with the study of Late Gothic or Early Renaissance architecture, and slowly worked backward, so that it was only towards the end of the century that the qualities of Early Gothic and Romanesque, and finally of Early Christian and Byzantine art, were fully understood. The same principle applies in Russia. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century art was appreciated and utilized from the first; the earlier mediaeval periods were exhaustively explored only towards the end of the century.[4]

Benois offers a more substantial reasoning for the growth of a national style of painting. He claims that V. Schwarz (1838-69) initiated it, and that it was he who first displayed the colourful costumes of Old

[3]Hamilton, p. 254.

[4]Ibid., p. 255.

Russia, its customs and manners on canvas, but, because he was technically inadequate as an artist, he was only able to influence others, e.g., Surikov, without actually producing anything of great artistic value himself.[5] His influence on Surikov was profound:

> Surikov's mighty gift dealt the most crushing blow to the art of his colleagues, the 'Wanderers.' He showed how fascinating and significant is the sheer beauty of terrible events, as compared with any moralising interrelation forced upon them. He was the first to break off with the sentimentally humanitarian ideals of the sixties, which were so alien to the true problems of art.[6]

Benois also believes that the most significant factor in bringing about a change in art was the work of Surikov[7] who impressed Russian painters in the same way that Dostoevsky and Tolstoy influenced writers.

The Slavic theme was especially strong in architecture. The construction of the Church of the Resurrection in St. Petersburg on the exact place of the assassination of Alexander II indicates the intensity of this theme; the uniform classical beauty of the city was now challenged by an edifice purely Slavic in design. The Cathedral of St. Vladimir in Kiev was another building along Slavic lines which was erected to commemorate the one-thousandth anniversary of the founding of Rus'. The study of Vasnetsov begins with this cathedral, for he was commissioned to paint its frescoes. V. M. Vasnetsov (1848-1927) undertook this colossal task which took him more than ten years to complete. At the time, many felt that he had begun a new school of art in Russia, but soon afterwards, a number of early Russian icons were

[5] Benoist, p. 142.

[6] Ibid., pp. 142-143.

[7] Ibid., p. 143.

cleaned and restored to their former beauty which rendered Vasnetsov's religious paintings pale by comparison. On this, critics agree, but they also seem to disregard Vasnetsov's profound sincerity in executing this gigantic work. Vasnetsov's own words signify his attitude toward his artistic task:

> I as an Orthodox and devout believer can only light a little candle to the glory of God. Perhaps it is not even of the finest wax, but it is offered from my inmost heart.[8]

Concerning Vasnetsov's work in general, one finds that almost all critics--even the frequently severe Stasov--were sympathetic; one of these writes:

> True, in comparison with Surikov the art of Victor Vasnetzov may appear flabby and ineffective. But, in the first place, this does not apply to the whole of his output; and secondly, in the evolution of art the most powerful works are not always those which are most significant. On the contrary, faint hints sometimes engender revolutions, and if Vasnetzov did not revolutionize Russian painting, he undoubtedly planted in it seeds which gave, and are still giving numerous sprouts.[9]

The religious and historical-folklore paintings of Vasnetsov have remained popular not only because sincerity radiates from them, but because they reveal a national spirit. Grabar writes:

> In a historical picture the spirit of history is important above all and less significant are its external forms. In the pictures of Bryullov's school there was not only no spirit but also no form, for no one searched for them. Only in a few things of the early-deceased Schwarz there is felt for the first time such a search, but only Victor Vasnetsov and Surikov entirely devoted themselves to it. The former's picture "The Bloody Battle" opens a new era in Russian art, and with it begins a long line of those passionate attempts to solve the ideal of national beauty, which does not end to this day and, probably, will long inspire artists

[8] Newmarch, p. 228.

[9] Benoist, pp. 146-147.

> who feel their ties with the people. Not only in the past of the people, but also in its present there is a darkness of mystery and in painting there were not a few attempts to solve them, as in the works of Nekrasov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoi, Pechersky, Leskov, Chekhov, Merezhkovsky and so many others in Russian literature.[10]

In his thorough criticism, Stasov emphatically states that

> Surikov and V. M. Vasnetsov showed in their (few and, unfortunately, too infrequent) works that the historical spirit in Russian painting <u>exists</u> and can magnificently develop.[11]

And later, he writes of Vasnetsov's work

> as a representation of the pre-historic history of tribes which lived in ancient Russia; the scenes of the "Stone Age," created by him on the walls of the Moscow Historical Museum, are excellent works, are truly monumental in all parts and details. No one in Russia has yet painted anything approximating this gigantic series of scenes and pictures, the fruit of great creative phantasy and a scientific study of obscure antiquity.[12]

While working on the Cathedral of St. Vladimir in Kiev, Vasnetsov's collaborator was M. V. Nesterov (1862-1942), a pupil of Perov. Nesterov was unable to continue the purpose painting of his teacher. He approached each subject with love, for he was a religious person and heavily steeped in mysticism. Critics agree that never has northern Russian scenery and the lives of mediaeval monks been so well depicted as by Nesterov, who could grasp the meaning of the existence of recluses in a cold, grey, northern climate.

The contribution of Nesterov was two-fold: he gave the public an insight into the mystic past of the religious life of Old Russia and cleared the way for the "World of Art" movement.

[10]Grabar, pp. 94-96.

[11]Stasov, p. 166.

[12]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 167.

> Nesterov's design, like his taste, was unmistakably refined and--a parallel to the discoveries of Gauguin and the Symbolist painters after 1889--led him to the conclusion that formal elements were as artistically important as the ends they served.[13]

M. A. Vrubel (1856-1910) stands out in the history of Russian art as an exception to those who used the accepted modes in painting. He was a brilliant and creative artist, a symbolist whose works are difficult to classify since his manifold talents enabled him to project many forms. On his religious paintings, Benois writes:

> Among all the artists of the second half of the nineteenth century, who approached religious themes, only Vrubel did so with the same burning passion and the same most delicate penetration into the mysteries of beauty, which distinguish the art of Ivanov ....At the same time among our artists he is the only true poet, who hovers above the common level.[14]

Vrubel was interested in all aspects of painting including colour, form, and subject, and did not have to rely on the narrower outlook of his contemporaries to reproduce the life of Old Russia. His religious paintings also haunted the viewer's mind with their erratic, yet ethereal beauty. Vrubel eventually became insane, and art historians have speculated on the influence of his madness on his paintings. He was undoubtedly obsessed with demons and his illustrations to Lermontov's poem, "Demon," are among the best ever done by any Russian artist. Most artists attempted to create a school of painting or to win a group of followers. Vrubel was different, however:

> Vasnetzov created a school of more or less close imitators; Vrubel created no school, for his art was too original and complex. But Vrubel alone is worth an entire school. He was

[13]Hamilton, p. 259.

[14]Benoist, p. 112.

> the sole true and beautiful idealist of the later period of Russian art.[15]

Of the triad of painters discussed in this chapter, Vrubel stands apart for he contributed the most to the emergence of the idea of "art for art's sake." The other two, Vasnetsov and Nesterov, have more in common:

> The Russian temperament has two apparently paradoxical and irreconcilable aspects; its mysticism and its realism. In some artists these two attributes are found united, as in Vasnietsov ....In other painters the two visions--the concrete and the ideal--seem to remain for ever sundered. Such is the case with the ... contemplative idealist Nesterov ... [who] has much of Dostoievsky's sweetness, but prefers to keep out of his fragrant art the evil odour of sin. He is not one of the Russian artists whose altruism takes him down into Hades, like Repin or Verestschagin; his pictures reflect the cloistral purity of a Fra Angelico and seem to be the artistic interpretation of St. Paul's precept; "whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good repute--think on these things."[16]

[15]Benoist, pp. 147-148.

[16]Newmarch, pp. 234-235.

CHAPTER VI

THE WORLD OF ART

The World of Art (Mir Iskusstva)[1] was formed in the early 1890's by a group of painters and writers who wished to examine the standards of art in Russia, to introduce new ideas from the West, and to acquaint the public with them.[2]

> The history of art records a continuous process of actions and reactions. Between two generations or, to take the title of a famous novel by Turgenev, between Fathers and Sons, misunderstanding and opposition are almost inevitable. Towards 1890 the Wanderers' crusade was coming to an end, and the canons of social art no longer found an echo. Young people turned away from this utilitarian and narrowly nationalistic art; their gaze again turned towards the West.[3]

In their search for a new style in art, these young people[4] began to imitate the work of foreign painters. Consequently, western European art gradually regained the influence that it had exerted in Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century.

[1] Réau, p. 107: "This title is characteristic: it implies and underlines the fact that the new generation hoped to extend its horizon beyond the Russian world and to become integrated in European art. A cosmopolitan ideal substituted a Slavophile ideal."

[2] Actually, not only to acquaint the public but also to educate it. The journal Mir Iskusstva, first published in 1898, introduced ideas from the West and severely criticized the peredvizhniki and Chernyshevsky's aesthetics.

[3] Réau, loc. cit.

[4] Especially Diagilev, Benois, Bakst, Serov, Golovin, and Malyavin.

At first the miriskusniki[5] examined the work of their immediate predecessors;[6] later, they studied and painted eighteenth-century St. Petersburg. The following is a Soviet interpretation of the Mir Iskusstva artists' retrospection:

> They poeticized the Russian aristocratic culture of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century; they were also overcome by the beauty of Versailles. Hence their love grew to include old St. Petersburg, Pavlovsk, old country estates with their tennis parks, white statues, and beautiful pools. The miriskusniki were interested least of all in the life of the people and in historical events of the past. The eighteenth century attracted them through the originality of its artistic style.[7]

According to Hamilton, the main aim of the miriskusniki was to reorganize and renovate an art which had become "shabby," although their work "consisted more in the formulation of a mood or tone in approaching artistic problems than in the discovery of a new philosophy of art or the invention of a new technique."[8] Since the Academy of Art symbolized reaction, the miriskusniki challenged its principles:

> The World of Art denied first of all academism, in which it saw nothing but conventionality and insincerity, "traits characteristic of academism of every period," but intensified in Russia by the academicians' neglect of modern Western art. Yet the group was equally vigorous in repudiating the tendentious art of the Itinerants, and in general all the realistic and positivist ideas which had been so popular with the preceding generation.[9]

[5]The name given to the members of Mir Iskusstva. Undoubtedly the name peredvizhniki affected the choice of this term.

[6]Miliukov, p. 64: "It was this comparative conservatism of the founders of the World of Art that permitted some artists of different trends to join the group."

[7]Istoriia Russkogo Iskusstva, pp. 382-383.

[8]Hamilton, p. 263.

[9]Miliukov, pp. 62-63.

The significance of their journal is almost as important as that of their painting.

> The periodical's influence on the development of the graphic arts has been ascertained. Because of the influence, this particular aspect of art in Russia has risen to a level higher than that of England or Germany, i.e., in countries which have long traditions in the graphic arts. The flourishing graphic arts have influenced contemporary painting. Undoubtedly the graphic arts will influence Russian painting even more in the future when, perhaps, a new period in painting will begin.[10]

Folk art and the decorative arts were recognized as legitimate forms of expression and were either revived or revitalized where they were still in use:

> Patrons came forward to provide ... facilities by founding workshops on their estates in which the craftsmen could benefit from the advice of leading artists. Among the more important of these foundations were the workshops which Princess Tenisheva established in the 1890s on her estate at Talashkino near Smolensk, where tuition in choral singing was available to craftsmen engaged on producing pottery, embroidery, and textiles; the Cholokhov carpet factory also offered vocational training to its workers and the Stroganovs went to the length of founding a technical institute.[11]

The success of these workshops increased interest in art. Even the local governments (zemstva) opened numerous schools and centres for the teaching of the decorative arts and handicrafts. The most important Russian centre for experimenting in the arts was Abramtzevo,

> a country house near Moscow in which Aksakov and Gogol had lived; it was purchased in the 1870s by the Muscovite merchant-prince Savva Mamontov ... with the result that he persuaded his guests at Abramtzevo, who invariably included a number of distinguished artists, to help in building, decorating, and adorning a new village church....The experience had proved so rewarding that Mamontov decided to establish at Abramtzevo workshops in which pottery, much of it reflecting the influence of Art Nouveau, and

[10] Grabar, Istoriia russkogo iskusstva, p. 142.

[11] Rice, pp. 243-244.

> various forms of applied art were taught and practised under the supervision of Marya Yakunchikova. Many leading artists of the day, including Vrubel, furnished these workshops with designs, and as a result the objects produced in them were so distinctive that they left their mark on the decorative arts of pre-Revolutionary Russia.[12]

The miriskusniki are given credit for transforming Russian theatre and ballet from simple entertainment to creative art. Mamontov, a dedicated patron of the theatre, selected prominent artists such as Vasnetsov, Vrubel, Korovin, and Golovin to work on stage settings and costumes. Their experiments in the theatrical arts were successful:

> Vroubl in particular created so opalescent a vision in his settings both of The Swan Princess, inspired by the story of Tsar Saltan, and of The Queen of the Sea, based upon Sadko, that he provided Russian art with something very similar in feeling to the pictures of Monet. His effect was considerable, and the younger men who had already shared his outlook now became still more insistent in their demands. The ablest and keenest of them were the two painters Leon Bakst and Alexander Benois, and their friend Serge de Dyagilev, though a layman, was equally enthusiastic. His fine critical faculty, his sure taste, and his ardent sympathy with the movement led him to assume the editorship of a periodical entitled "The World of Art."[13]

While the result of their combined creative work within the World of Art was already outstanding in Russia at the end of the last century, in the early 1900's their work was proclaimed a success across Europe. In 1907 Benois and Diagilev

> scored a triumph with the performance of Le Pavillon d'Armide at the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg. The book, stage-settings, and costumes were by Benois, the music by Nicholas Tcherepnin, and the choreography by Michel Fokine. Anna Pavlova was Armide, and the young Nijinsky danced the part of her slave. The following year Diaghilev presented Moussorgsky's Boris Godunov at the Paris Opéra....This first triumph of Russian art outside the boundaries of Russia united certain elements of the

[12] Rice, pp. 243-244.

[13] See Tamara Talbot Rice's article "Decorative Art " in Russian Art, D. Talbot Rice (ed.) (London, 1935), p. 77.

> Slavic Revival of Moscow with the ideals of the Mir Iskusstva group in St Petersburg.[14]

Diagilev was not satisfied with merely selecting many of the leading Russian artists for his theatrical productions; he also solicited the assistance of foreigners, e.g., Picasso, Matisse, Braque, Chirico, and others. At this time Russia, more than any other European nation, witnessed productions created by its prominent artists of the theatre and the plastic arts.

Mir Iskusstva had enemies, the apologists for the peredvizhniki, who seldom avoided an opportunity to criticize the miriskusniki for their decadence. In Stasov's view they did not even deserve this criticism:

> There are simply no Russian decadent pictures. If Vrubel did not paint his amazing panel "The Morning," over which the whole of St. Petersburg gasped in unison in 1898, if he did not paint his ugly triptych "The Judgment of Paris" in 1899 and his monstrous "Demons" and "Pan," and if Malyavin did not paint his terrible red women in 1900 and his equally terrible, and unbelievable portrait of Repin, then there would be nothing to show of the Russian decadents--there are none.[15]

Contemporary Soviet art historians, while recognizing the importance of Mir Iskusstva in colour reform and the interrelationship of the arts, minimize its significance because of its advocacy of the principle "art for art's sake," unacceptable to them.

> Art in Russia has always been in close touch with the people. The members of the 'World of Art' group made it 'art for the elite' hence branding it with the imprint of a certain affectation....Now it was losing its significance of daily necessity; the understanding of truth and even of artistic truth was losing

[14]Hamilton, p. 263.

[15]Stasov, pp. 173-174.

> its magnetic force. All this of course was a threat to Russian traditions in art. And indeed, in the 'World of Art' there is something extraneous, alien to the age-old principles of the Russian school.[16]

By "tradition" Alpatov means realism. One of Stasov's dreams came true in Russia towards the end of the 1920's when realism secured for itself the dominant place in Soviet art. Of this dream Stasov wrote: "Realism will nevertheless be victorious in the end and again will place art on its true, wise, and talented path."[17]

Thus, the significance of Mir Iskusstva was profound, not merely because its members expounded the principle of "art for art's sake," but because

> this society had brilliantly solved the problem of the day: to establish a living link between Russian painting and that of Western Europe which had been lost during the epoch of the dictatorship of the 'Wanderers.' The organization saved the art of the great Russian portraitists of the XVIIIth century from an undeserved oblivion....[This society] carried on a struggle against the tyranny of the academy and the 'Wanderers'; it created a Russian decoration for the theatre, opera and ballet, which was in tune with the 'discovery' of Russian music by Musorgski, Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov....It created Russian drawing ... special book decorations ... and it revived the Russian architecture of the epoch of classicism.[18]

Moreover, Mir Iskusstva may be compared with the peredvizhniki movement since both went beyond the bounds of painting. The latter embodied in art the idea of social progress through the use of ideological realism. The former involved an integration of the arts--theatre, ballet, and decorative, applied, and pure art. By rejecting realism, Mir Iskusstva followed the trend of western European art.

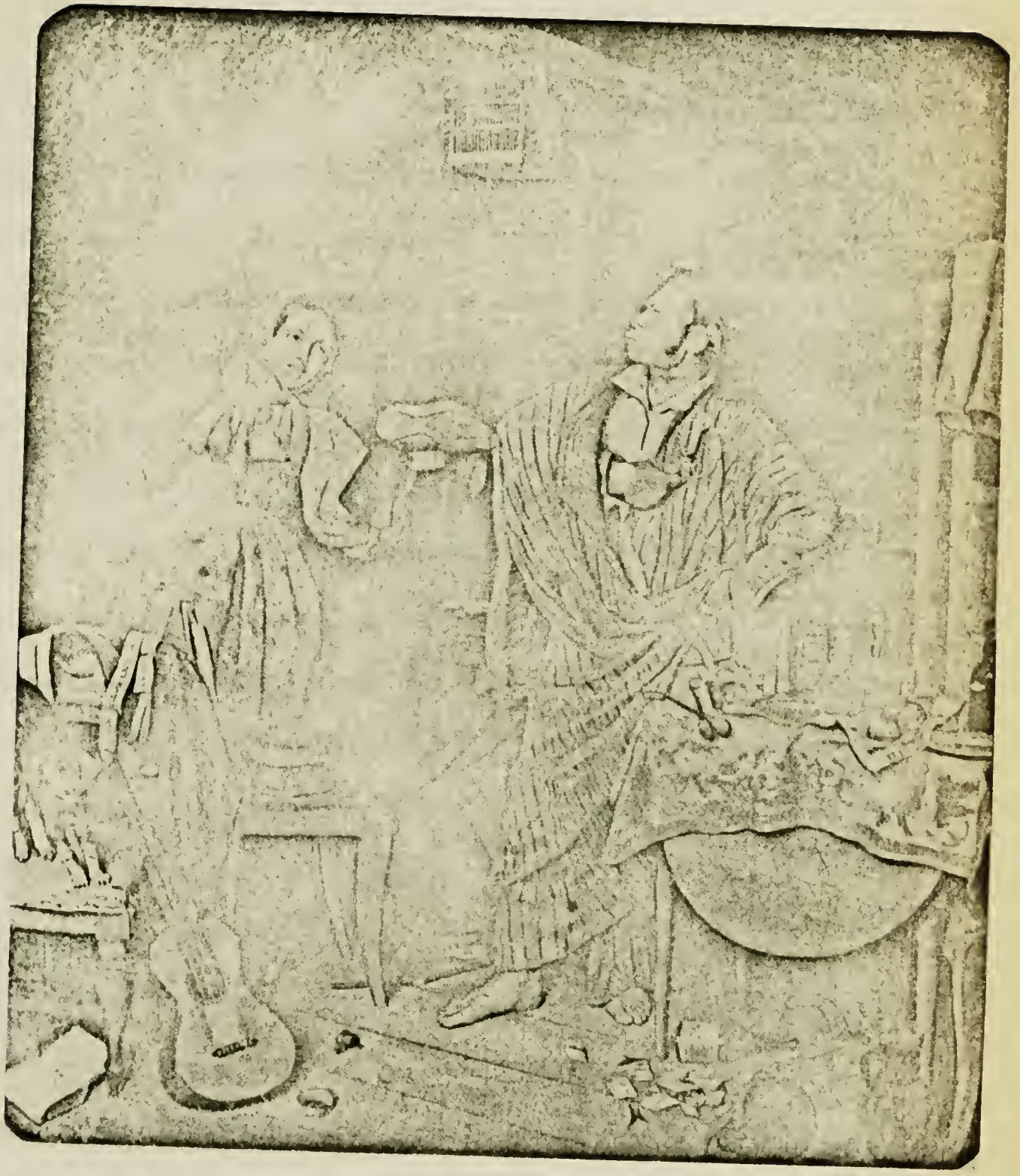
[16]Alpatov, p. 301.

[17]Stasov, p. 174.

[18]Loukomski, p. 36.

PART II

Ten paintings representative of the second half of the nineteenth century are now analyzed. "A Newly Decorated Knight" by Fedotov belongs to that period in which Russian realism was approaching maturity, was becoming a realism ideologically motivated and based; this "ideological" realism was well reflected in "The Arrival of the Governess at a Merchant's Home" by Perov. Repin's "Ivan the Terrible and his Son," Surikov's "Boyarina Morozova," and Vereshchagin's "The Vanquished" all represent the Russian Historical School. "Christ in the Wilderness" by Kramskoi and Ge's "The Last Supper" are illustrative of the search for new forms of expression in religious painting. Vasnetsov's "Bogatyri" and Nesterov's "The Vision of the Boy Bartholemew" are indicative of the growth of the Slavic Revival in Russian painting. Finally, "The Swan Queen" by Vrubel is an example of the work of the World of Art.



"A Newly Decorated Knight" by P. Fedotov

Many observers of Russian art include Fedotov's works with those of the peredvizhniki. The works of the latter differ, however, since they were mainly concerned with ideological realism while Fedotov wished to satirically depict Russian middle-class life by means of simple realism; moreover, as his first exhibited work, "A Newly Decorated Knight," reveals, he was also interested in counteracting and overcoming the influence wielded by the conservative Academy of Art.

This painting depicts a young, recently-decorated official who has arisen on the morning after a jocund celebration with, no doubt, some of his companions. For the benefit of the servant, he arrogantly points to the decoration which he has pinned to his dressing gown. While passing him a boot, she surveys the room in which both table and floor are littered with the remains of the feast. The young man is as disorderly in appearance as the setting around him.

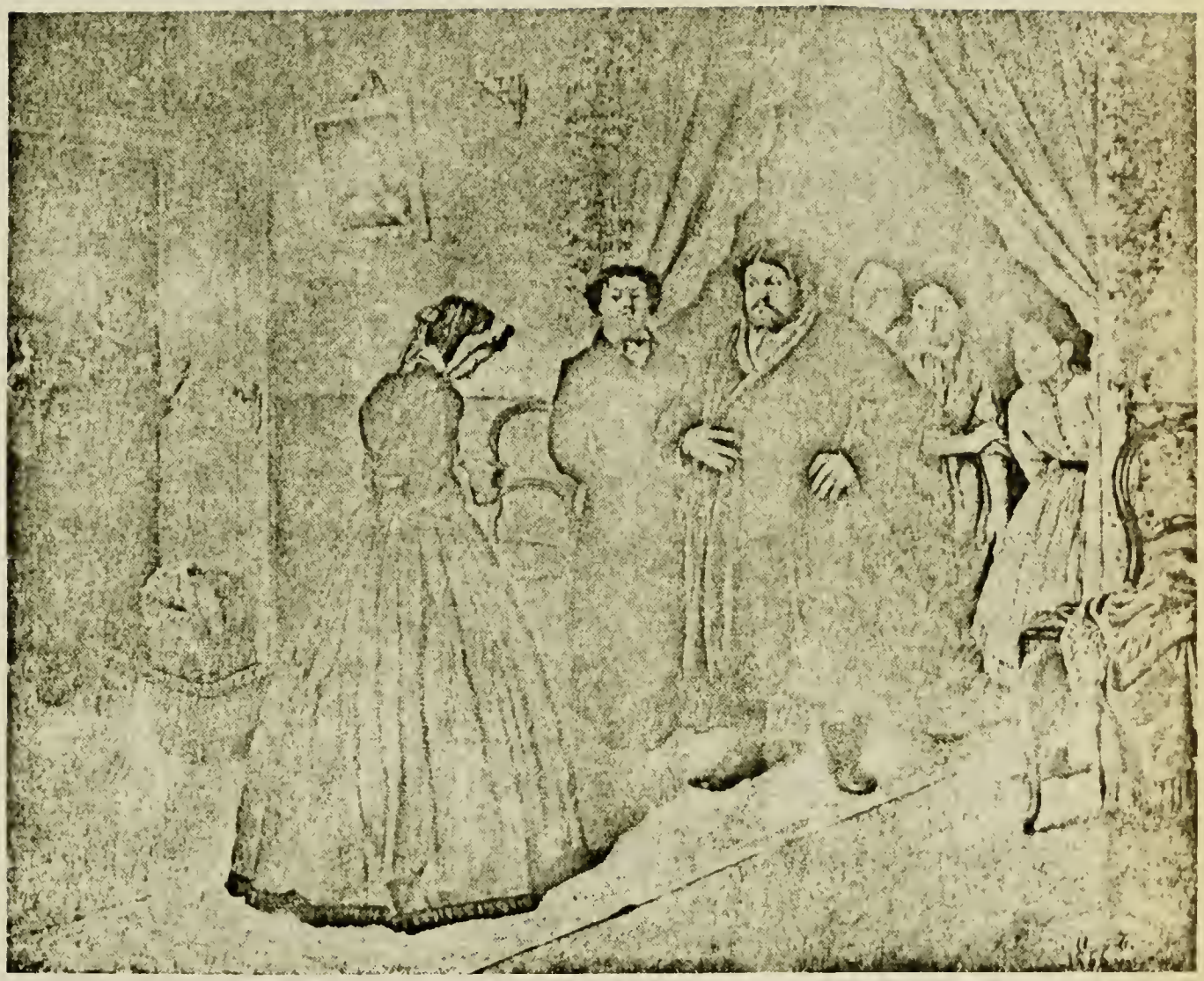
Fedotov excelled in realistically depicting Russian life. He seldom practised selection in his pictures. For example, in this painting the abundance of detail is striking; Fedotov meticulously included everything that might be found in the room of a dissolute bachelor who is used to wining and dining with his comrades. Little is left to the imagination. By emphasizing the banality of the setting, Fedotov reveals the pretentiousness and emptiness of certain Russian attitudes. He challenged the Academy's principles in employing this

genre:

> Did not the pose of the "newly decorated knight," who was draped in his dressing-gown as if it were a toga, sound the death-knell for the "antique" poses of heroes in pompous and basically false academic pictures?[1]

Furthermore, this work should be regarded as an important event in the transition from academic-classical painting to the ideological realism of the peredvizhniki.

[1] L. Volynski, Litso vremeni: kniga o russkikh khudozhnikakh (Moscow, 1962), p. 31.



"The Arrival of the Governess at a Merchant's Home" by V. G. Perov

Perov is one of the most representative of the ideological painters, and this painting, completed in 1866, is both characteristic of Russian ideological paintings, and superior to most of them because of its didactic subtlety and respect for the viewer. The peredvizhniki must have assumed that the public was incapable of understanding their works unless an exaggerated form of expression was used. This assumption often led to the painting of melodramatic pictures which have lost most of their intended instructive power.

On the canvas "The Arrival of the Governess at a Merchant's Home," however, one sees a sincerity of purpose, a "civic" representation of Russian reality. Perov captures the moment when the governess has arrived and is on the point of presenting her credentials to the master of the house. The young woman appears to be poor for she has but one case and a single hat box; yet, she appears elegant in spite of her modest possessions and attire. She is delicate, but her profile reveals a sensitive, intelligent face. In contrast to the governess is the merchant and his family, each of which looks out with the round, robust face often associated with those of Russian merchants of the past. The doorway in which they stand serves as a frame for this "group portrait." The whole family curiously surveys the new governess, and, except for the boy who smirks and takes a haughty pose, one senses no feeling of antipathy toward the young woman; on the other hand, no

enthusiasm at her arrival is discernible among them. At the side door the viewer beholds another "group portrait" of the servants who treat the young woman's arrival as a comical event. The décor of the room indicates a lack of taste. The gaudy garland, the strange position of the portrait, and the inappropriate position of the sconce produce an uncultured atmosphere.

One Soviet interpretation of this painting--it shows the hard and unenviable lot of women in Tsarist Russia[1]--is not wholly correct, as the picture primarily symbolizes the unjust power of the uncultured parvenu over the intelligent and cultured people. Thus, it is a good example of purpose or ideological painting.

[1] Istoriia russkogo iskusstva, T. II (Moscow, 1960), p. 37.

"Ivan the Terrible and His Son" by I. E. Repin

Most of Repin's paintings are historical studies or portraits, and he is best remembered for them. In this picture, however, another aspect of Repin's work is seen, for he depicted a historical scene in which Ivan IV and his son are psychologically and penetratingly presented.

In a fit of rage, Ivan the Terrible had struck his only son with an iron-shod staff; Repin depicts the scene following this incident. The chair from which Ivan had leaped is upset, as if symbolizing the end of the stability of the Throne, the end of a dynasty. At the sight of blood, Ivan has regained his senses and has rushed to his son--the staff has been cast aside. At this moment one senses terror and contrition. The father grasps the body of his dying son, while covering the wound with his hand as if to stop the flow of blood. His eyes stare frenziedly, acutely aware of the terrible act he has just committed. They seem to reflect the thousand thoughts which occur at similar moments of impending death. But the act has been done, and the viewer is witness to its immediate consequences. Ivan realizes that his son is dying and cannot be saved. No longer is he Tsar; instead, he is a father whose paternal feelings make him embrace his son to give him warmth, strength, and the will to live. The son also pictorially embodies human qualities as profound as those of his father. His face shows a tranquillity beyond the recognition of either pain or

approaching death. He looks out with the face of a mystic who, enraptured with a belief in human goodness, betrays no fear of death. For this type of person, death signifies not the end of accumulating material wealth, the end above all feared by the self-centred, greedy person: it is rather a continuation of life, but "life" in the pure, inviolable, eternal sense. While the father tries to impart strength into his son, the latter, in spite of the horrible act committed against him, consoles his father by feebly resting a hand on his arm, while attempting to support himself with his left arm. There is no bitterness on his face--his eyes are soft and gaze into space, while the lips reveal a trace of a smile of consolation for the father.

The two heads, fusing together, intensify each other's power. The terror, shame, and uncontrollable anguish of the father's face are greatly heightened by the meek, innocent, and forgiving face of the son. Not surprisingly, Russians have often claimed that Ivan's face is one of the most revealing ever painted in Russia, and perhaps even in Europe.[1]

This painting has always had a mesmerizing effect on the public. In 1913, for example, the canvas was slashed three times by a man who cried out, "Enough of blood!"[2] This is not astonishing, but Repin's reaction was. He returned to Moscow and in a single day repaired and repainted the faces, making use of a purplish hue of which he had recently become fond. Grabar and other artists were shocked as much by

[1]Grabar, Istoriia russkogo iskusstva, T. I, p. 85.

[2]Volynski, p. 215.

the repainting as by the vandalous act itself and promptly removed all the overpainting. Then they restored the canvas according to the latest techniques, and it thus has remained with Repin's original tone.

"Ivan the Terrible and His Son" is not an example of realism, it is not didactic, nor does it belong entirely to the realm of historical painting. If any designation must be used, the most satisfactory would be "psychological realism." Few Russian paintings reveal such a definite, unsubdued, psychological approach to realism.

To describe general characteristics of a people entails caution, for without it, over-simplification can result. Bearing this in mind, the following commentary throws light on an interesting aspect of the personality of the Russians:

> The most widespread tender emotion that Great Russians value can perhaps be called sympathy-pity. English possess no single word which covers the connotations of the Russian terms (zhalitsia, sochustvovat', otzivchivost'), though 'pity' is the most usual translation....It is less than pity because it generally excludes the feeling for the mentally and physically handicapped, the maimed or the physically sick; it is more than pity because it is as desirable--perhaps more desirable--to be the recipient of another's sympathy-pity, than to offer this sympathy-pity to another....It can perhaps be defined as 'a sympathetic understanding and feeling for the moral and spiritual anguish which others are undergoing.[3]

This is precisely what is encountered in Repin's painting. The viewer can truly feel and understand the anguish that the father-filicide is experiencing, and the emotion of "sympathy-pity" goes out to him from the canvas.

[3]Geoffrey Gorer, and John Rickman, The People of Great Russia (New York, 1962), pp. 182-183.

"Boyarina Morozova" by V. I. Surikov

This painting depicts an episode in the religious strife during the reign of Alexei Mikhailovich (1629-76), the father of Peter the Great. Patriarch Nikon had subjected the Russian Orthodox Church to reforms, now seemingly unimportant, but reforms which had split the Church into two opposing groups. Those opposed to the reforms were led by the Archpriest Avvakum who saw in them a force destructive of the traditional and national character of their religion and, consequently, of the basic fibre of old Russian life.

Morozova, the central figure in this picture, was one of Avvakum's most fanatic followers. Serving as an example for those opposed to the reforms, she is chained and driven along Moscow's streets in a crude sleigh. On her way to exile which will bring probable torture, even death, she is turned over to the masses to be ridiculed and mocked.

Stately Moscow, so commonly shown in historical paintings, is not seen; instead, a village atmosphere prevails, an atmosphere in which Muscovites of all classes and ages throng the streets to watch what they surely recognized, even then, as a historic event. Morozova has been humiliated, but her spirit is not broken. She realizes that she must sacrifice her life, but she is determined to resist to the very end what she cannot accept. Her shawl resembles a nun's coif, and under it her face burns with fanaticism. Bidding farewell to the Muscovites, she defiantly shows them the sign of the two-fingered cross,

this sign which the Old Believers refused to relinquish, and which had been the cause of much of the religious strife. The crowd is basically divided into two groups: one grieves at the loss of this popular noblewoman, while the other scoffs at her, mocks her, and regards the event as a farce. In the latter group there are laughing boyars, unsympathetic priests, a guffawing peasant who drives the sleigh, and frolicking boys. Mashkovtsev claims that Surikov saw nothing wrong in portraying the children manifesting indifferent and, under such circumstances, even cruel attitudes, because the painter felt that emotional responses are dependent on one's personal involvement in any situation.[1]

As she walks beside the sleigh, Morozova's sister, Princess Urusova is the only one prepared to share the victim's fate (which, incidentally, she did). The rest of the crowd, mainly nuns, noblewomen, and beggars, is openly sympathetic toward her, but these people cannot help her. Lowered heads and downcast eyes all attest the sad occasion.

The technical aspect of the painting shows that Surikov had worked on it for a long time. The horizontal line of the crowd is impassive, while the strong lines of the figure of Morozova, of the sleigh, the horse, and the running boy all give movement to the centre of interest. Surikov was always conscious of the need for movement. With this in mind he added pieces to the canvas:

> I simply could not get my horse to budge. Finally I added one more piece of canvas, and the horse started off....I had to find

[1] N. Mashkovtsev, Vasily Surikov (Moscow, n.d.), p. 32.

> the right distance between the frame and the sleigh in order to make the sleigh move. If I cut the slightest bit off the distance, the sleigh would stop dead. On seeing 'Morozova,' Tolstoi and his wife told me: "You ought to cut off the bottom, there's too much of it--it's in the way." But if I had done that the sleigh would have stood still.[2]

"Boyarina Morozova" is one of the best Russian historical paintings. Even without an understanding of Morozova's time, the viewer is touched by the unmistakable aura of sadness. The more one views the painting, the stronger he feels himself a witness to the event, and this fact, perhaps, more than anything explains the painting's success. While most historical paintings bring back the past, in beholding Surikov's "Boyarina Morozova" the viewer himself unconsciously feels a part of the events portrayed.

[2]Mashkovtsev, p. 29.

"The Vanquished" by V. V. Vereshchagin

Vereshchagin, an artist-correspondent in the Turkestan Campaign of 1867-1868 and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, wished to depict the horrors of war as he saw them.

> These subjects I have treated in a fashion far from sentimental, for having myself killed many a poor fellow-creature in different wars, I have not the right to be sentimental....My intention was to examine war in its different aspects, and transmit these faithfully. Facts laid upon canvas without embellishment must speak for themselves.[1]

Vereshchagin became a pacificist, yet he continued to paint frightful scenes of war with a view to evoking a feeling of revulsion among Russians against the bloodshed.

> Before me, as before an artist is War, and I strike at it with as much strength as I possess; whether my blows are strong or real is another question, one concerning my talent, but I strike out with all my might and without mercy.[2]

In "The Vanquished" (also known as "Requiem for the Slain), the artist portrays a scene in which a regimental priest, assisted by a soldier, intones a requiem for the repose of the departed souls of the slain. Bodies, many of them mutilated, are scattered on the endless field, and the two figures placed asymmetrically on the left emphasize the vastness of the ground before them. The scene also suggests the folly of war which has torn comrades apart. This painting is didactic;

[1]Hamilton, p. 291.

[2]A. K. Lebedev, Vasilii Vasil'evich Vereshchagin (Moscow, 1958), p. 203.

thus, it adheres to the basic principle of the peredvizhniki. Vereshchagin, however, is usually regarded as an "independent" painter who belonged only to a broad "historical" school.

"Christ in the Wilderness" by I. N. Kramskoi

Christ's forty days in the wilderness has not often been portrayed successfully as a subject. The reason for this is that the painter is unable to use either a mystical or a psychological approach in depicting the anguish of the Lord. After many years of contemplation, Kramskoi attempted to resolve this problem.[1]

The purpose of this picture was to hasten the emergence of a modern Russian school of religious painting. It reveals none of the stylization and abstractness characterizing mediaeval or even ancient icons, nor any of the historicity found in the religious paintings of Ivanov and Bruni. Kramskoi avoids these features and attempts to portray Christ psychologically, as "the Man" capable of experiencing all of man's mental and physical feelings. There is nothing "Russian" or national about Him. Even the landscape, although taken from Chufut-Kaleh in the Crimea,[2] could be representative of any country. In this painting the centre of interest is the figure of Christ; here He does not appear to reflect the qualities associated with the appellations given to Him, e.g., the Saviour, the Redeemer, or the Lover of Mankind. He is Christ the Man who

> willingly renounces all personal happiness and consciously

[1]See Newmarch, p. 213 for an extract from a letter written by Kramskoi to his friend Vasiliev. In it he discusses the problem.

[2]Newmarch, p. 213.

> descends into Hades as a supreme act of love....[Kramskoi] depicts the moment of resolve, the deliberate choice of the Man-God to lay down His life for His friends.[3]

While the painting "Christ in the Wilderness" is basically realistic in the depiction of the landscape and of the figure of Christ, Kramskoi's individual mode of expression emanates from the painting. In this it is superior to the paintings of the peredvizhniki, who were usually content with a general expression of their own ideology, rather than with personal or individual expression.

[3]Newmarch, p. 215.

"The Last Supper" by N. N. Ge

Ge was persistently tormented by the problem of painting biblical themes in a contemporary spirit. "The Last Supper," painted in 1863, was the beginning of a series of paintings devoted to this theme, but only in the 1890's did he feel that he expressed himself satisfactorily. By that time he had renounced realism for a rather abstract form of drawing, while stressing the psychological aspect of his work.

"The Last Supper" was a digression from the accepted standards of Russian religious painting. Hamilton, however, finds nothing artistically original in it: "The general plan was reminiscent of Caravaggio, and the dramatic chiaroscuro and commonplace physical types could have been found in Rembrandt."[1] Stasov also stresses this painting's negative qualities:

> Most of the apostles are banal and show neither type nor character, and this, after Ivanov's painting, is unbearable; Apostle Judas too ... is a melodramatic figure....The main shortcoming is that Christ is presented as a completely insignificant personality, an elegiac melancholic, as if He is ready to burst into tears this very minute rather than to show energy, character, a resolution of attack and a strength of accusation when, before His eyes, evil and betrayal appear.[2]

Stasov's criticism is valid only if the painting is examined in isolation. On the other hand, general criticism of Ge's work would

[1]Hamilton, p. 247.

[2]V. V. Stasov, Izbrannye sochineniia; zhivopis', skul'ptura, muzyka (Moscow, 1952), p. 451.

probably be more moderate if "The Last Supper" were to be regarded as the basis for an entire cycle of religious canvases. While realism becomes less important in Ge's works, psychological content characterizes them more and more. "The Last Supper" has other positive features:

> A departure from "iconology," real seriousness of mood, a certain (incidently not too remote) realism, space, picturesqueness, and even a certain novelty in arrangement, the rather pleasant types of Christ and Apostle Peter, and, finally, original lighting.[3]

Although Stasov criticized the painting at the time of its exhibition, other critics praised it: "Ge infused a new spirit into Russian painting and progressed further than Ivanov along the road to the freedom of style."[4] Some critics misunderstood the significance of Ge's approach to religious painting; Pogodin, for example, wrote: "No, this is not the Last Supper but an open evening party."[5]

Ge used his first large religious painting "The Last Supper" as a means to express a new technique in his search for spiritual truth. He neither subordinated the picture to the idea, a practice followed by the peredvizhniki, nor did he negate the idea like most of the miriskusniki. Ge's technique consisted of a personal expression whereby his concept of spiritual truth could be revealed.

[3]Stasov, Izbrannye sochineniia..., p. 451.

[4]As quoted by Stasov, ibid., p. 607.

[5]Ibid., p. 608. In Russian: "Net, eto ne tainaia vecheria, a otkrytaia vecherinka."

"Bogatyri" by V. M. Vasnetsov

"Bogatyri" combines the features of historical and folklore painting with a pronounced strain of Slavophilism. Here an attempt is made to instill in the viewer a love for Russia's past as reflected particularly in the byliny, i.e., the national epic poems.

Three bogatyri (epic heroes) fighting for the glory of their prince and land are depicted. From left to right they are Dobrynya Nikitich, Ilya Murometz, and Alyosha Popovich. The heroes (embodying the highest ideals of the people) stopped on the boundary of the lands of Rus' which they are preparing to defend: Dobrynya is unsheathing his sword, Ilya's lance points in the general direction of their gaze, and Alyosha remains prepared with bow and arrow.

The uninterrupted horizon, the endless trees, the grasslands, and the nearer hills all combine to show the nature of the land, yet in the foreground looms a rock seemingly symbolizing the beginning of enemy land; this rock becomes, as it were, a visual metaphor. The hoofs of two of the horses rest upon the rock as if to show that all enemies will be trampled in the same manner. Even the seedlings have a symbolic meaning. The distant pines represent the Homeland; there they are tall, healthy, and in abundance. Here on the borderland, however, they are small and insignificant, yet not without hope. By painting some of them on the rock, the artist might possibly be showing that they are hardy and obstinate, and that under the protection of the

heroes they, too, can become like the distant pines; thus the lands of Rus' can spread towards new horizons.

Epic and lyric qualities are pronounced in the picture. Both Dobrynya and Ilya manifest an epic quality through their strength and wisdom, although the latter reflects mainly power and strength, while wisdom emanates from the former. The conception of wisdom and all its attributes is effectively shown: the sword and sheath are perpendicular to the figure of Dobrynya and when his horse's bridle and harness are surveyed, the result is almost a mathematical diagram. The colour of the horse is white (representing light and wisdom); it stands erectly and calmly with its mane cascading symmetrically. All the lines in the picture of Dobrynya and his horse are balanced both in colour and volume.

The composition of Ilya and his horse clearly reveals brawn rather than wisdom. Ilya sits his horse in a jaunty position, even a bit carelessly, but he is ever certain of his balance. To accentuate this recklessness he has even removed his foot from the stirrup. His shield is casually slung over his arm, while his lance is pointed downward as if purposely to break that favourite principle of order--symmetry. His strength is exaggerated by the ease with which he holds the heavy mace. Ilya's horse is black and heavy and almost resembles a draught-horse, but it reflects its master's characteristics. The horse's mane flows over to one side, not unlike its master's slouch, and its body also leans to one side with the head in a pert position. All of this exudes boisterousness and extroversion.

A lyric quality is present in Alyosha's portrayal, and his very

presence accentuates the epic character of the other two. This lyricism also lends the picture greater feeling, while still other aspects of the people's nature--restraint, sensitivity, youthfulness, and joy--are present. The composition of Alyosha and his horse is symmetrical and serene. The lines are weak and free-flowing, and nothing is abrupt in this composition except for the strong line of the bow which serves to emphasize the lyrical qualities of this hero. The horse, in contrast to the other two, is not of a basic or solid colour, but of a blend of colours. Its head is lowered as if it is preparing to take a step forward. Alyosha's face has a playful air about it partly because it is beardless, but also because it is turned to the side. A stringed instrument, scarcely visible as it hangs behind Alyosha's right arm, adds to the lyrical quality of the painting.

Even the clouds have been employed to depict the traits of the heroes; Dobrynya, in his wisdom, places his arm parallel to the outline of the cloud behind him; Ilya defies the contours of the clouds with his upraised arm; finally, Alyosha is overshadowed by clouds not massive and turbulent, but soft and gentle. Nature occupies an important place in Slavic life: Dobrynya's attitude suggests an acceptance of it; Ilya battles with it; and Alyohsa shows that nature is not always severe and sombre, but possesses bright qualities as well. The two heroes on the left prominently display their right arms, commonly known as fighting arms, while Alyosha shows restraint, and, undoubtedly, viewers of the painting are expected to see these qualities in themselves.

One's eyes eventually rest on the yellow patch of ripening hay.

A falcon flies immediately above it; a second falcon remains perched on a rock. The use of the birds seems to suggest that the vigilance of the heroes will not only keep the enemy at bay, but also will repulse him; thus the falcons, representing the people (another example of a visual metaphor), can soar freely in their own domain.

Despite the historical-folklore content of this painting, realism still makes itself felt. The continued success of the picture could be explained by its lack of didacticism.

"The Vision of the Boy Bartholemew" by M. V. Nesterov

Nesterov's forte lies in depicting mediaeval Russian life and northern Russian landscapes. These features are clearly visible in his painting "The Vision of the Boy Bartholemew."

Throughout the centuries Russians have been familiar with the hagiology of St. Sergius of Radonezh who, perhaps, is their favourite saint. St. Sergius, known as Bartholemew in his childhood, lived with his parents near Moscow. Once, while trying to find some stray horses, he came upon an old monk of the Great Order. The monk [skhimnik] blessed him and imbued him with a desire for knowledge, for the boy had previously been reluctant to treat his studies seriously. When Bartholemew himself became a monk, he established a monastery on the site of his meeting with the old man. This monastery soon became one of the most important in Russia--the Trinity-Saint Sergius Monastery.

The importance of St. Sergius in the history of both the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian State is profound. Ware claims that this was because St. Sergius was a "builder of Russia":

> Such he was in three senses: politically, for he encouraged the rise of Moscow and the resistance against the Tartars; geographically, for it was he more than any other who inspired the great advance of monks into the forests; and spiritually, for through his experience of mystical prayer he deepened the inner life of the Russian Church. Better, perhaps, than any other Russian saint, he succeeded in balancing the social and mystical aspects of monasticism. Under his influence and that of his followers,

> the two centuries from 1350 to 1550 proved a golden age in Russian spirituality.[1]

Thus, one finds it easy to understand the Russians' familiarity with this particular subject, and the reason for the immense popularity of Nesterov's painting.

The viewer is admitted to the scene at the moment of the blessing, and his gaze immediately falls upon the figure of the boy. Not yet an adolescent, Bartholemew already has the features of an ascetic and a future saint, i.e., he has a thin, frail body, a serious face, and deep, penetrating eyes. He is in religious ecstasy, but this feeling is captured in a way completely dissimilar from that used by western European artists. A subdued depiction of religious ecstasy in Russian art has probably been influenced by the restrained form of expression of traditional Byzantine iconography.

Bartholemew has forgotten about his errand. The bridles are still draped over his arm, and he is enraptured with the awesome event. The purity of the colour of his shirt is reflected in the halo, beard, and sleeves of the monk, as if to suggest that one day the boy, too, will become a religious figure. Behind the monk stands a gnarled oak, as sturdy and ageless as himself. Bartholemew, on the other hand, is beside a spruce sappling which, in appearance, is as frail as he is.

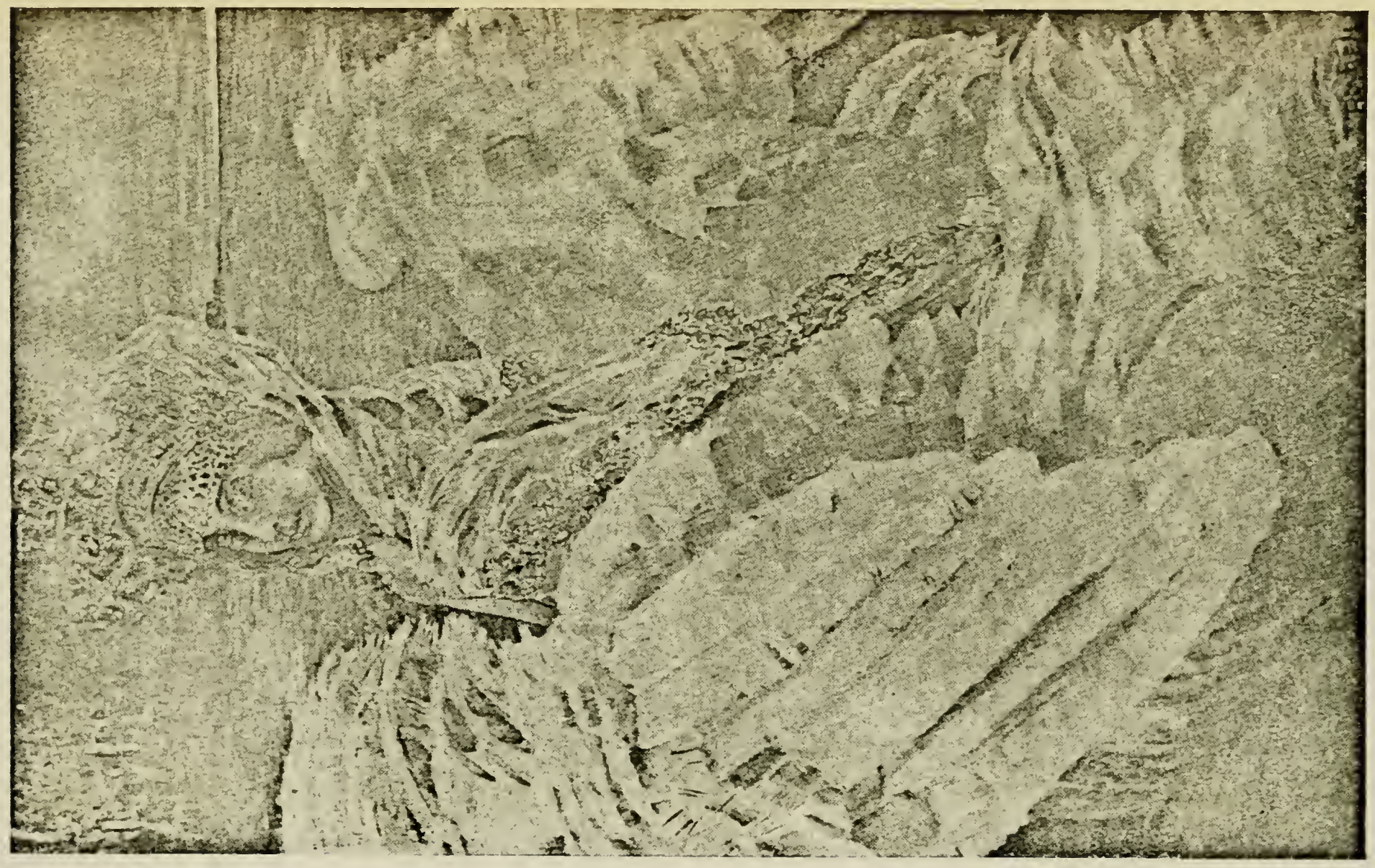
The representation of nature in the picture has an infinite quality: it is mediaeval Russian nature, and yet it will always be associated with the popular impression of northern Russian scenery. The work is thus superior to the works of the peredvizhniki, since

[1]Timothy Ware, The Orthodox Church (Harmondsworth, Mx, 1963), p. 95.

Nesterov's painting has attracted permanent interest. The landscape is not merely to be admired: on the contrary, nature in its realistic portrayal can be "felt," and the permanent interest afforded it is sustained by Nesterov's historical and lyrical interpretation. The composition of the painting is not unlike the setting of a folk tale: the artist depicts a meandering stream, a hay meadow, the colourful autumn leaves accentuated by the intense green of the spruce trees, and, of course, a little mediaeval church. Nearer the foreground stands a birch, the tree whose name is almost synonymous with the name "Russia."

This painting "breathes of Russia," and in this lies Nesterov's success, for it is not an ordinary religious painting, nor is it simply a historical picture. It is a religious-historical painting realistically drawn, and, at the same time, it is purely Russian.

Critics, and particularly the peredvizhniki, have regarded this picture as an abandonment of realism for idealism in the form of a haloed monk and a boy in ecstasy. They have failed to note, it would seem, that this is realism in which mediaeval life is represented as authentically as the painter could imagine.



"The Swan Queen" by M. A. Vrubel

The legendary Swan Queen is the subject of several of Vrubel's paintings, although this one is perhaps the most popular in Russia. It is a "phantasy" portrait of a half-human, half-bird creature whose face reflects the imaginary world about it. The pallor of the face stresses the Swan Queen's fragility and her supernatural essence. Her large eyes, evincing suffering and despair, are full of the knowledge that she is in a phantasmagoric world in which her partially human form cannot be preserved. A feeling of melancholy pervades the entire painting. A sense of loneliness characterizes the portrayal of this solitary figure on an endless expanse of water which blends into the fading colours of sunset. These colours are, in turn, reflected on the wings of the Swan Queen, and thus one can associate the immediate foreground with the distant horizon. This composition seems to impel the figure towards the water.

The nervous strokes used in the painting suggest a feeling of urgency which contrasts strongly with the pale face gazing at the abandoned shore.

This picture is an excellent example of "art for art's sake," for in it there are no ideological or didactic qualities: on the contrary, an imaginary world is portrayed with an almost unrestrained element of lyricism of a kind seemingly well-suited for the stage. "The Swan Queen" also represents the acme of Russian nineteenth-century

painting, for although the peredvizhniki had established a truly Russian school of painting, the miriskusniki, of which Vrubel was a member, enabled Russian painting to enter the field of European art. In the field of combined arts, Russian art even managed to surpass that of western Europe. This painting, then, attests the rapidity with which nineteenth-century Russian painting matured from a foreign, classical-academic thing to a cosmopolitan phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

Historical Background

During the reign of Peter the Great, the first serious attempts were made to secularize Russian painting. By inviting foreign artists to Russia, Peter and his successors, particularly Elizabeth and Catherine II, achieved this goal. With the establishment of the Academy of Art, which was later the repository of academic or "official" artists, Russian painting became westernized. The quality of the works of the native artists was low. Wiegand explains the reason for this:

> Due to the war [1812] and the rise of national feeling, there were now few foreign artists. The great Russian literary figures were nearly all of aristocratic origin and familiar with Western culture. The new Russian artists, on the other hand, came from the middle or lower classes and had no opportunity for education abroad.[1]

In the first half of the nineteenth century Russian painting was dominated by the Academy of Art which espoused and nurtured classicism (academism), although this style was often strongly tinged with romanticism. Italy was regarded as the source of inspiration, since art in France still featured a revolutionary spirit. Kiprensky, Bryullov, Bruni, and Ivanov were some of the painters characterized by romantic traits in their academic works. Ivanov's canvas "Christ Appearing to the People" shows Christ's appearance at the very moment

[1] Charmion Wiegand, "Russian Arts" in Encyclopedia of the Arts (New York, 1946), p. 871.

when St. John is baptizing a group of people; in it one sees a good portrayal of a wide range of human emotions, again expressed with an element of romanticism. While under the influence of the Academy, which in turn was dominated by western European ideas, artists did not produce anything Russian in spirit.

Venetsianov painted in the age of "restrained" romanticism in Russia, and his works reflect this; he ignored trends in both European and Russian painting. Although his style was often stilted and unnatural, it led to a depiction of Russian life and, consequently, to the nascency of realism. He was the first important Russian painter who had not attended the Academy, and thus his ideas were formulated outside it.

Development of Realism

In the late 1840's Fedotov introduced realism, a new form of painting in which he could satirize the bourgeoisie. Chamot compares him to Hogarth:

> His subjects are much less violent and full-blooded ... and his technique is smoother, as is only to be expected in the more refined mid-nineteenth century. Nor is there any moralizing intention behind them....His attitude to human weaknesses, mildly satirical yet full of tenderness, can be compared to that of his literary contemporaries Krylov and Gogol'.[2]

Ideological Realism

In the late 1850's and in the 1860's, painters in western Europe began to search for a new artistic expression characterized by an

[2]Mary Chamot, Russian Painting and Sculpture (Oxford, 1963), pp. 19-20.

original technique through which a general tone and effect would be manifested. In Russia, the situation was antithetical because artists "were more concerned with literary subject matter and the sociological impact of their pictures."[3] Russian painters finally felt that they were needed by their country and that they had a definite goal. The art of real painting

> was immediately reborn in their creations, and it was precisely to this painting that they were drawn and they had soon made up for lost ground and proved again the natural talents and attachment to painting of the Russian people.[4]

Perov developed Fedotov's mildly critical style into one openly satirical, but only in 1863 did the realists, under Kramskoi's leadership, band together and leave the Academy. They soon formed the Society of Travelling Art Exhibitions (the peredvizhniki).[5] Their work was didactic and socially-based, and they were obsessed with ideological or critical realism which they saw as

> a means to an end; to bring art to the people and to inspire and enlighten them, just as the various radical parties in Russia were seeking to enlighten them politically. For this reason, the Wanderers attached far more to the moral and literary aspect of art than to aesthetics.[6]

The peredvizhniki successfully began to bring art to the people by concentrating their attention on grave social problems and evils.[7]

[3]Chamot, p. 21.

[4]Loukomski, p. 9.

[5]The Salon des Refusés was organized in Paris in the same year.

[6]Wiegand, p. 872.

[7]Chamot, p. 21.

What arose in Russian painting as a result of ideological realism has not always been understood by Westerners because "the type of painting they practised is now so out of fashion and so seldom seen in the West that it is difficult for us to approach the Russian masters with an unbiased mind."[8] In the West, therefore, the history of art has relegated ideological realism to an insignificant place.

The works of the peredvizhniki had both a historical and social effect. According to Chamot they left to posterity "a large number of paintings of great historical interest, in that they depict a way of life that no longer exists."[9] Of greater importance, however, was their social contribution because they were motivated by dissatisfaction with the surviving order "just like the poet Nekrasov in his famous poem 'Who Can Live Happily in Russia?'"[10]

Repin, like Surikov, is one of the outstanding painters of this movement, although the latter devoted himself mainly to historical themes. Vereshchagin, another historical painter, was not one of the peredvizhniki.

The Slavic Revival

After the assassination of Alexander II, his son Alexander III initiated a period of reaction in which artists could no longer criticize social conditions. In painting, there was a change from the use of

[8] Chamot, p. 23.

[9] Ibid., p. 24.

[10] Ibid.

ideological realism to Slavophilism and religious-historical themes. Two painters representative of this period are Vasnetsov and Nesterov who evoked among the public a new understanding of their nation's past. By using historical and folklore subjects, they enriched the portrayal of Russia's cultural heritage.

Kramskoi and Ge were religious painters who attempted to introduce a new conception into religious art, but they were only partly successful because they did not embody genuine "national" feeling in their works. The latter was influenced by Tolstoy, and although his paintings (like those of Kramskoi) were not "Orthodox," they clearly indicate a revival of interest in religious art in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Mir Iskusstva

In the 1890's the World of Art made its appearance. The miriskusniki, under the leadership of A. Benois, wanted to end provincialism in Russian art, to introduce the latest trends from the West, and to investigate aristocratic eighteenth-century life.[11] Miliukov points out the effect of a closer union between Russian art and that of western Europe:

> The foreigners saw instantly that the Russians were not slavishly imitating their art, but were showing something original and unknown to them, which was accepted as being exotic--even barbaric, perhaps--but nevertheless unusual and worthy of recognition.[12]

They also tried to revive Russian handicrafts and peasant art on

[11] Chamot, p. 34.

[12] Miliukov, p. 75.

Mamontov's estate at Abramtsevo. In addition, they related painting to music, ballet, and theatre. Under Diagilev's guidance this interrelationship of the arts revolutionized the theatre first in Russia, then in western Europe.

The slogan of the miriskusniki--"art for art's sake"--implied a complete rejection of didactic ideological realism for beauty of style and form. Vrubel, perhaps, best typified the miriskusniki or "World Artists," since he was concerned with colour, line, and form instead of content.

By the end of the nineteenth century the younger generation of painters became more and more dissatisfied with the position of the World of Art; thereupon they renounced its principles

> and then as a point of departure they chose exactly what Benois and Diagilev had regarded as "excess" and "shell." The World of Art group had come to modernity by the way of history, and had endeavored throughout to maintain a certain historical objectivity. The new "children," frankly ignorant of history, had no desire to be objective.[13]

In conclusion, one can truly say that by the end of the nineteenth century, Russian painting had reached maturity and was no longer an imitation of Western art. In fact, it even attained a position of leadership in the field of theatrical painting.[14] Russian painting has earned its position in the history of art; in the second half of the nineteenth century much of this was accomplished by means of a unique use of content, but also through experimenting in technique.

[13]Miliukov, p. 71.

[14]Loukomski, p. 9.

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